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UNIVERSITY OF ALBERTA

FELICITER AUDAX:
THE UNION OF STYLE AND THEME IN *ANTONY AND CLEOPATRA*

by

TERESA MARY DOBSON

C

A THESIS

SUBMITTED TO THE FACULTY OF GRADUATE

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OF THE REQUIREMENTS FOR THE DEGREE OF

MASTER OF ARTS

DEPARTMENT OF ENGLISH

EDMONTON, ALBERTA

FALL, 1990

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The undersigned certify that they have read, and recommend to the faculty of Graduate Studies and Research for acceptance, a thesis entitled "*Feliciter audax*: The Union of Style and Theme in *Antony and Cleopatra*" submitted by Teresa Mary Dobson in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Arts.

Professor J. F. Forrest (Supervisor)

Professor H.A. Hargreaves

Professor J.V. Defelice

Date: September 28, 1990

For my parents

Love alters not with his brief hours and weeks,

But bears it out even to the edge of doom.

ABSTRACT

This thesis examines Shakespeare's *Antony and Cleopatra* with special emphasis being given to Shakespeare's use of his source, the individual tragedies of his two major characters and the style of the drama as a whole.

The source for *Antony and Cleopatra* is Sir Thomas North's translation of Plutarch's *Parallel Lives of the Greeks and Romans*. While certain passages of this text go essentially unaltered in the drama, Shakespeare does make vital changes which qualify the reader's understanding of the principal characters. The first chapter is devoted to an examination of these alterations. The following two chapters discuss the individual tragedies of Antony and Cleopatra and the manner in which these ultimately vindicate each other. The thesis concludes with an examination of the work as a whole, particularly the colloquial style in which much of the play is written and the choral functions of characters such as Enobarbus, Charmian and Iras.

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INTRODUCTION

Among Shakespeare's "Roman" plays, *Antony and Cleopatra* is distinguished by what may be called its "spaciousness." This quality encompasses, but is not restricted to, Shakespeare's conscious exploitation of his unlocalised stage by which he can shift his scene with the incomparable ease of cinematographic technique from Egypt to Rome, to a battlefield in Syria, to a Roman galley, and so on. It is a characteristic which pervades the entire drama, enveloping the characters and their values and giving the action its peculiar moral tone or flavour. Much of this atmosphere is created by the play's eclectic style which contains some of Shakespeare's loftiest sentiments couched in sublime poetry, all juxtaposed with slangy idiom and bawdy talk.

No doubt it is this remarkable expansiveness which Coleridge was alluding to when he suggested that the play's motto should be *feliciter audax*. Clearly Coleridge felt that the mixture of raciness and elevated expression was the happy product of an artistry that only through such boldness of treatment could persuasively advance the drama's theme, the tragic love-story of its hero and heroine.

This thesis purports to demonstrate, *inter alia*, the rightness of Coleridge's observation.

Chapter One

What Shakespeare Did to Plutarch

While some critics suggest that Shakespeare may have drawn from several sources the story of *Antony and Cleopatra*, all agree that his essential material was derived from Sir Thomas North's translation of Plutarch's *Life of Marcus Antonius* and the *Comparison of Demetrius and Antonius*. Geoffrey Bullough, who offers the most comprehensive overview of Shakespeare's probable sources in *Narrative and Dramatic Sources of Shakespeare*, suggests that the dramatist "could have developed all his plot and characterization" from Plutarch (Bullough 218). Even so, *Antony and Cleopatra* is for the most part an original piece of work. As M. W. MacCallum notes in *Shakespeare's Roman Plays and their Background*, few of Shakespeare's lines can be "easily traced" to his primary source:

> the number of passages repeated or recast from North is not considerable. In the whole of the first act [the] description of the retreat from Modena is the only one of any consequence, and though the percentage increases as the play proceeds, and they are much more frequent in the second half, even in the fifth act, the proportion of easily traceable lines is fifty-seven to four hundred and forty-six, or barely more than an eighth. (MacCallum 323)

The important fact which underlies MacCallum's figures is not that there are traceable lines in *Antony and Cleopatra*, but rather that the vast majority of Shakespeare's work is original. Indeed, even those passages which MacCallum refers to as "repeated or recast" are invariably altered so that

what was once undistinguished becomes sublime. In addition to revamping individual passages, however, Shakespeare has altered his source on a much larger scale and in doing so he has transformed the chronicle left him by North into a tragedy of such magnitude that it has stirred the emotions of audiences for centuries. To achieve this end the dramatist completely refurbished his source, adding and deleting episodes, emphasizing and de-emphasizing supporting characters, and in so doing entirely altering the light in which the protagonists are perceived. Ultimately, an understanding of *Antony and Cleopatra* cannot be fully obtained until one examines these changes and discovers what Shakespeare did to Plutarch and why he did what he did.

In the preface to his translation of the *Lives*, North claimed that his intention was not to write histories, but rather lives. However, the fact that North periodically administers a prosaic reprimand to his protagonists regarding what he refers to as their "naughty" lifestyle does not raise him above the level of historiographer. As Herbert Rothschild notes in his article "The oblique Encounter: Shakespeare's Confrontation of Plutarch with Special Reference to *Antony and Cleopatra*," North

> does report homely details and small incidents, but he treats larger events, especially military campaigns, continuously and often in great detail. The lives tend to progress chronologically, and include materials occurring contemporaneously with the person under discussion but not directly involving him, much less portraying the lineaments of his mind. (Rothschild 410)

Rothschild subsequently points out that North's dual function as both interpreter and reporter would not qualify him as anything more than a

good historian to Renaissance readers (Rothschild 410). The primary difference between North's *Life of Marcus Antonius* and Shakespeare's *Antony and Cleopatra*, then, is that the first is merely a good history while the second is a great tragedy. As Alice Griffith notes in *The Sources of Ten Shakespearean Plays*: "to compare the source and the play is to appreciate the fascinating alchemy of genius at work, transforming the ephemeral into the eternal" (Griffith 1).

If asked to select the passage in the play which best illustrates what Griffith means by this statement, one would be inclined to choose the famous Cydnus passage in which Enobarbus eloquently recalls Cleopatra's first meeting with Mark Antony. In Plutarch the passage gives us our first glimpse of Cleopatra, whom Antony has summoned to "aunswere unto such accusacions as were layed against her, being thus: that she had aided Cassius and Brutus in their warre against him" (Bullough 273).[1] Although North insists that Cleopatra is "the last and extreamest mischiefe of all other" to light upon the hero, his description of her journey down the river Cydnus in her barge is nevertheless impressive. Indeed it is not difficult to understand why Antony is captivated by this fascinating woman:

> . . . when she was sent unto by divers letters, both from Antonius him selfe, and also from his frendes, she made so light of it, and mocked Antonius so much, that she disdained to set forward otherwise, but to take her barge in the river of Cydnus, the poope whereof was of gold, the sailes of purple, and the owers of silver, which kept stroke in rowing after the sounde of the musicke of flutes, howboyes, citherns, violls, and such other

---

[1] All quotations from North's translation of Plutarch are taken from the text provided in Geoffrey Bullough. *Narrative and Dramatic Sources of Shakespeare*. Vol. 5. London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1964.

> instruments as they played upon in the barge. And now for the person of her selfe: she was layed under a pavillion of cloth of gold of tissue, apparelled and attired like the goddesse Venus, commonly drawen in picture: and hard by her, on either hand of her, pretie faire boyes apparelled as painters doe set forth god Cupide, with litle fannes in their hands, with the which they fanned wind upon her. Her Ladies and gentlewomen also, the fairest of them were apparelled like the nymphes Nereides (which are the mermaides of the waters) and like the Graces, some stearing the helme, others tending the tackle and ropes of the barge, out of the which there came a wonderfull passing sweete savor of perfumes, that perfumed the wharfes side, pestered with innumerable multitudes of people. Some of them followed the barge all alongest the rivers side: others also ranne out of the citie to see her comming in. So that in thend, ther ranne such multitudes of people one after an other to see her, that Antonius was left post alone in the market place, in his Imperiall seate to geve audience: and there went a rumor in the peoples mouthes, that the goddesse Venus was come to play with the god Bacchus, for the generall good of all Asia.
> (Bullough 274)

This passage is modified by Shakespeare in II.ii. His changes are subtle; however, they are nonetheless consequential, and by comparing the texts we can most certainly see the "fascinating alchemy of genius at work":

> The barge she sat in, like a burnish'd throne,
> Burnt on the water. The poop was beaten gold,
> Purple the sails, and so perfumed that
> The winds were love-sick with them; the oars were silver,
> Which to the tune of flutes kept stroke, and made
> The water which they beat to follow faster,
> As amorous of their strokes. For her own person,
> It beggar'd all description: she did lie
> In her pavilion--cloth of gold, of tissue--
> O'er-picturing that Venus where we see
> The fancy outwork nature, On each side her
> Stood pretty dimpled boys, like smiling Cupids,
> With divers-color'd fans, whose wind did seem
> To [glow] the delicate cheeks which they did cool,
> And what they undid did. . ..
> . . . Her [gentlewomen], like the Nereides,

> So many mermaids, tended her i'th'eyes,
> And made their bends adornings. At the helm
> A seeming mermaid steers; the silken tackle
> Swell with the touches of those flower-soft hands,
> That yarely frame the office. From the barge
> A strange invisible perfume hits the sense
> Of the adjacent wharfs. The city cast
> Her people out upon her; and Antony
> Enthron'd i'th' market-place, did sit alone,
> Whistling to the air, which, but for vacancy,
> Had gone to gaze on Cleopatra too,
> And made a gap in nature. (II.ii.191-218)

Shakespeare incorporates many of North's images into Enobarbus's speech, particularly the physical detail of the barge, Cleopatra's apparel, her attendants and their functions, the crowds which gather along shore to greet her and the final account of Antony sitting alone in the market place. Yet in spite of their similarities, the two passages affect the reader very differently. North's version has a gossamer quality to it; the barge seems not to float on the river Cydnus, but through mist encircling the pinnacle of Mount Olympus. Cleopatra is as Venus attended by seeming Cupids and Nereides. She journeys not to "aunswere unto such accusacions as were layed against her" but to "play with the god Bacchus, for the general good of all Asia." Shakespeare sustains the atmosphere of other-worldliness that he finds in the source, yet he carries North's metaphor a step further. As Kenneth Muir notes in *The Sources of Shakespeare's Plays*, the poet adds "'metaphysical' hyperboles which diffuse a tone of luxury and sensuousness throughout the passage" (Muir 222). Thus, the sails are "so perfumed that/ The winds [are] love-sick with them," and the oars stroke "to the tune of flutes" making "The water which they beat to follow faster,/ As amorous of

their strokes." Moreover, where in North Cleopatra is "attired like the goddess Venus," Shakespeare describes her as surpassing even the goddess of love in beauty: "O'er-picturing that Venus where we see/ The fancy outwork nature." Finally, in the dramatic account not only do "multitudes of people" run to see the barge, but the very air goes "to gaze on Cleopatra too," thereby making "a gap in nature." In the end Shakespeare's Cleopatra is infinitely superior to North's; she is a woman of peerless beauty whom the very elements worship. As Muir asserts:

> the successive elements--the winds, the water, the air--are represented all as succumbing to the enchantment of love which breathes from the great Queen and her burning barge; and by this varied return on a single motive North's inconsequential panorama is given an organic unity. (Muir 223)

The Cydnus passage is an excellent example of Shakespeare's ability to transform "the ephemeral into the eternal" because it has been borrowed so exactly from the source that the changes the poet has made are easily discerned. However, throughout the play Shakespeare makes modifications to his source on a much larger scale. Many of these he effects in the process of transforming history into tragedy, and to achieve an understanding of such changes it is necessary first to say something about the nature of tragedy.

In *Aristotle's Theory of Poetry and Fine Art*, S.H. Butcher has translated Aristotle's famous definition of tragedy in the following manner:

> Tragedy . . . is an imitation of an action that is serious, complete, and of a certain magnitude; in language embellished with each kind of artistic ornament, the several kinds being found in separate parts of the play;

> in the form of action, not of narrative; through pity and fear effecting the proper purgation of these emotions. (Aristotle 23)[2]

What Aristotle is alluding to when he speaks of the purgation of pity and fear is the medical doctrine of *catharsis*, the source of much controversy among critics. Yet, briefly, it may be assumed here to refer to the cleansing process which takes place when the audience is released at the finale from its aroused state of pity for the protagonists' predicament and of fear that they may not hold fast to those values which have inspired them. In a later passage the possible circumstances in which these emotions are stimulated are indicated:

> If an enemy kills an enemy, there is nothing to excite pity either in the act or the intention--except so far as the suffering in itself is pitiful. . . . But when the tragic incident occurs between those who are near or dear to one another--if, for example, a brother kills, or intends to kill, a brother, a son his father, a mother her son, a son his mother, or any other deed of the kind is done--these are the situations to be looked for by the poet. (Aristotle 49-51)

According to Aristotle's definition of tragedy, then, we discover that North's *Marcus Antonius* yields the ideal tragic circumstances: two lovers unwittingly cause each other's deaths. Yet in spite of this, North's work is not tragic; his material certainly has tragic potential, but it is up to the poet, Shakespeare, to exploit this potential.

Shakespeare makes most of his changes to the source in an effort to transform North's relatively unremarkable Antonius and Cleopatra into

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[2] All citations attributed to Aristotle are quoted in translation from S. H. Butcher. *Aristotle's Theory of poetry and Fine Art*. New York: Dover Publications, Inc., 1951.

figures of tragic stature. In his commentary on tragedy, Aristotle suggests that the tragic hero or heroine must possess certain qualities in order to be so called. Firstly, the characters must be intrinsically good and will be if they have a purpose and that purpose is good. Secondly, the dramatist must "aim at propriety." (Aristotle suggests "a type of manly valour"). Finally, the characters must be both "true to life" and consistent or, failing this, "consistently inconsistent" (Aristotle 55). If we adopt Aristotle's measures of tragic stature and apply them to North's Antonius and Cleopatra, we immediately see that these characters are not tragic--they meet none of the standards save, perhaps, that they are true to life. For example, Aristotle's first stipulation is that a tragic hero must be good. At various times North's Antonius is described as generous, kind-hearted and enthusiastic, but such descriptions are frequently accompanied by reminders of his failings:

> Then was Antonius straight marvelously commended and beloved of the souldiers, bicause he commonly exercised him self among them, and would often times eate and drinke with them, and also be liberall unto them, according to his abilitie. But then in contrary manner, he purchased divers other mens evill willes, bicause that through negligence he would not doe then justice that were injuried, and delt very churlishly with them that had any sute unto him: and besides all this, he had an ill name to intise mens wives. (Bullough 258-259)

Aristotle further asserts that goodness is achieved only by those with purpose. In North, Antonius's "purpose" is managing his portion of the Roman empire, and this purpose he chronically neglects. Whether the second of the criteria, valour, can be attributed to Antonius is also

questionable because the hero allows himself to be so ruled by his passions that he is virtually unable to function as either a leader or a warrior. Finally, the hero is not consistent. The pattern of his life is erratic: short intervals of valiancy are punctuated with stretches of excess. Essentially, North views Antonius as a man who is potentially admirable but who is destined for failure because of the foolish recklessness with which he leads his life.

North's antagonist (and this is unquestionably how we must refer to his version of Cleopatra) is introduced as

> the last and extreamest mischiefe of all other . . . who did waken and stirre up many vices yet hidden in [Antonius], and were never seene to any: and if any sparke of goodnesse or hope of rising were lift him, Cleopatrae quenched it straight, and made it worse then before (Bullough 273).

In the *Life* the Egyptian Queen is clearly delineated as a Pandora-like foil to Antonius who unleashes the worst of his vices: lust. After the hero becomes involved with her he loses what remains of his potency as a warrior. Indeed, he frequently endangers both himself and his soldiers by making inexcusable errors in battle, "being so ravished and enchaunted with the sweete poyson of her love, that he had no other thought but of her, and how he might quickly returne againe: more then how he might overcome his enemies" (Bullough 284). Gradually the "pestilent plague and mischiefe of Cleopatrae's love" completely destroys his integrity:

> in the ende, the horse of the minde as Plato termeth it, that is so hard of rayne (I meane the unreyned lust of concupiscence) did put out of Antonius heade, all honest and commendable thoughtes. (Bullough 283)

Ultimately, even Antonius' death is not depicted as noble: "[he] . . . slue him selfe, (to confesse a troth) cowardly, and miserabley, to his great paine and griefe" (Bullough 321). North does concede, however, that at least the hero kills himself "before his bodie [comes] into his enemies hands" (Bullough 321).

In *Antony and Cleopatra* we see North's unlikely characters transformed into figures of tragic stature. As the drama begins, Philo is speaking to Demetrius about the sorry regression of his once Mars-like captain. This initial description of the protagonist seems familiar to those who are acquainted with Shakespeare's source. Philo complains that Antony has lost interest in his third of the Roman empire; instead, like a fool, he has become completely devoted to the bewitching Cleopatra. Philo's speech functions as a prologue; he briefly details Antony's noble past, reports a recent change in his behaviour and then, as trumpets sound and Antony and Cleopatra come on stage followed by a train of servants, he turns to the audience and declares:

> Look where they come!
> Take but good note, and you shall see in him
> The triple pillar of the world transform'd
> Into a strumpet's fool. Behold and see.
> (I.ii.10-13)

By opening the play in this manner Shakespeare manages to skirt several of the problems he encounters in his source. Firstly, unlike North's hero, Antony has already met Cleopatra by the time the play begins. The only account we have of his former life is Philo's speech documenting his past valour and his current lack thereof:

> Those his goodly eyes,
> That o'er the files and musters of the war
> Have glow'd like plated Mars, now bend, now turn
> The office and devotion of their view
> Upon a tawny front; his captain's heart,
> Which in the scuffles of great fights hath burst
> The buckles on his breast, reneges all temper,
> And is become the bellows and the fan
> To cool a gipsy's lust . . .. (I.ii.2-6)

Thus, the protagonist is not portrayed as a man who has been chronically prone to rioting and excess all his life and who appears merely to be indulging his baser instinct when he finds his match in a woman. Rather, Shakespeare's Antony is one who not long ago was esteemed by all he encountered, who ruled a third of the Roman empire, who fought like a god alongside his soldiers, yet who has inexplicably lost interest in both his kingdom and his reputation because of his so-called "lust" for a certain Egyptian Queen. Such a predicament seems preposterous. Surely the "triple pillar of the world" could have any woman he wanted. If he valued his empire in the least he would not risk losing it by ignoring his duties, yet this is exactly what he appears to do in the ensuing scene.

As the protagonists come on stage they are talking of love. Cleopatra asks her companion: "If it be love indeed, tell me how much," to which he replies, "There's beggary in the love that can be reckon'd" (I.ii.14-15). In the midst of their conversation a messenger arrives from Rome whom Antony clearly has no time for. His subsequent speech detailing as much is a central one, for in his rash rejection of Rome he begins to enlighten the audience to his purpose in life:

> Let Rome in Tiber melt, and the wide arch

> Of the rang'd empire fall: Here is my space,
> Kingdoms are clay; our dungy earth alike
> Feeds beast as man; the nobleness of life
> Is to do thus [embracing]–when such a mutual pair
> And such a twain can do't, in which I bind,
> [On] pain of punishment, the world to weet
> We stand up peerless. (I.i.33-39)

In the above passage we see that Antony is very much motivated by his love for Cleopatra. Thus, in the first thirty-nine lines of the text, Shakespeare has managed what North never achieves: he has raised his male protagonist at least above the common level by giving him a higher purpose in life–one which, to Antony, makes ruling the world seem like child's play. Although the audience cannot be certain at this moment of whether Cleopatra reciprocates such feelings, eventually we discover that she too values her love for Antony even above life itself. Once purpose has been established, the rest of Aristotle's measures of tragic stature fall into place. Both characters are necessarily noble, because although they struggle with their values throughout the drama, they nonetheless adhere to them until death. Moreover, by adhering to their values they are being consistent and in this consistency they are true to life.

There remains one element relating to character which Aristotle suggests must be present in tragedy; namely, that the death of the tragic figure must effect the "proper purgation" of pity and fear. In order to stimulate such emotion, the protagonist must naturally be one with whom the audience can identify. The characters in the source do not inspire such emotion; therefore, Shakespeare softens them in an effort to make them more sympathetic. He achieves this softening in part by rearranging

North's plot. Essentially, he simply deletes or revises episodes which shed a questionable light on his protagonists while accentuating others which make them appear more noble. Perhaps the most noticeable of his deletions is that of the Parthian campaign. Joseph Satin succinctly summarizes the episode in *Shakespeare and his Sources*:

> Antonius marched into Arabia and Armenia at the head of a large army. Because he moved too fast, being eager to return to Cleopatra as soon as possible, his lines of supply grew dangerously thin. At this point the Parthians . . . began a merciless campaign of guerilla warfare which devastated and demoralized Antonius's army. . . . After long and bitter running battles with the Parthians, on top of which came famine and disease, the remains of Antonius's army finally crossed the river of Araxes into Armenia. 'There Antonius mustering his whole army, found that he had lost twenty thousand footmen, and four thousand horsemen, which had not all been slain by their enemies: for the most part of them died of sickness . . .." (Satin 586-587)

This campaign represents what M.W. MacCallum calculates occupies nearly a fifth of the *Life*. In addressing the dramatist's complete omission of it, MacCallum initially observes that it is "unsuitable for dramatic purposes," but then so is a battle at sea, and yet Shakespeare has incorporated this into the plot. The truth, as MacCallum consequently points out, is that Antony's "management of the campaign detracts grievously from the glamour of 'absolute soldiership' with which the dramatist surrounds his hero and through which he wishes us to view him" (MacCallum 335-336). All told, Antonius loses twenty-four thousand men during the Parthian Campaign. By the time he crosses safely into Armenia his army must certainly be exhausted from their efforts, yet their captain continues to drive them

relentlessly:

> the great haste he made to returne unto Cleopatra, caused him to put his men to so great paines, forcing them to lye in the field all winter long when it snew unreasonably, that by the way he lost eight thowsand of his men . . .. (Bullough 287)

When he eventually arrives at his final destination, we are not told that the hero is distressed by his losses, but rather that in his impatience to see Cleopatra again he "wist not what to doe, and therefore to weare it out, he gave him selfe to quaffing and feasting" (Bullough 287). It is no wonder that this episode is deleted, for it would be difficult to admire the "absolute soldiership" of a man who so little values the lives of thirty-two thousand men.

Similarly, Shakespeare carefully revises other Plutarchan episodes in which Antony's soldiership is in question. Such is the case in the famous scene depicting Antony's conflict with Caesar at sea, which abruptly ends when the protagonist deserts his fleet and flies "like a doting mallard" after Cleopatra's retreating ship. Here, the audience's attention is diverted from the soldiers Antony leaves behind fighting off Caesar's well-manned fleet. Enobarbus relates the dismaying incident in III.x:

> Naught, naught, all naught! I can behold no longer.
> Th'Antoniad, the Egyptian admiral,
> With all their sixty, fly and turn the rudder.
> To see't mine eyes are blasted. (III.x.1-4)

The only allusion made to the men who remain to fight in their clumsy ships is Scarus's response to Enobarbus's request for an update on the events: "On our side like the token'd pestilence,/ Where death is sure"

(III.x.9-10).

Conversely, Plutarch's version of these same events emphasizes the plight of Antonius's warriors. Indeed, in the source, the general's desertion is clearly depicted as an act of betrayal:

> when he saw Cleopatraes shippe under saile, he forgot, forsooke, and betrayed them that fought for him, and imbarked upon a galley with five bankes of owers, to follow her that had already begon to overthrow him, and would in the end be his utter destruction. (Bullough 301)

North's description of Antonius's subsequent speech to his friends draws momentary sympathy from the reader: "[he] toke one of his carects or hulks loden with gold and silver, and other rich cariage, and gave it unto his friends: commaunding them to depart, and to seeke to save them selves" (Bullough 302). However, this illustration of the protagonist's generosity is undercut when the reader is again returned to the site of the battle where Antonius's army "shewed them selves so valliant and faithfull unto him, that after they certainly knewe he was fled, they kept them selves whole together seven daies" (Bullough 303). North cynically surmises that although Antonius's "navy was at length overthrowen . . . there were not slaine above five thowsand men" (Bullough 302).

In the drama Shakespeare revises this scene, and when Scarus and Enobarbus discuss Antony's desertion they speak of it as being disgraceful rather than treacherous. As Scarus remarks: "I never saw an action of such shame;/ Experience, manhood, honor, ne'er before/ Did violate so itself" (III.x.21-23). Consequently, the audience is not outraged by Antony's

manoeuvre; rather, we acutely feel his embarrassment. Moreover, our compassion for the hero is heightened in the subsequent scene when he delivers his self-mortifying speech to his followers:

> Hark, the land bids me tread no more upon't,
> It is asham'd to bear me. Friends, come hither:
> I am so lated in the world, that I
> Have lost my way for ever. I have a ship
> Laden with gold, take that, divide it; fly,
> And make your peace with Caesar. (III.xi.1-6)

Although Antony's words echo those his counterpart delivers in the source, the speech becomes more poignant in the drama because it is not undercut by any further references to the deserted fleet.

Another way in which Shakespeare softens his hero is by expanding on North's solitary reference to a soldier named Domitius. In the source this soldier defects to Caesar's camp just before the disastrous sea battle at Actium. North notes that Antonius deals "very friendely and curteously with Domitius, and against Cleopatraes mynde":

> . . . he being sicke of an agewe when he went and tooke a litle boate to goe to Caesars campe, Antonius was very sory for it, but yet he sent after him all his caryage, trayne, and men: and the same Domitius, as though he gave him to understand that he repented his open treason, he died immediatly after. (Bullough 298)

In the source no further reference is made to this soldier, while in the drama Domitius Enobarbus plays a vital role. Throughout the play Shakespeare assigns him several important orations. Accordingly, it is Enobarbus who eloquently delivers the famous passage describing Cleopatra's journey down the river Cydnus in her barge, and Enobarbus who astutely portends that Antony's impending marriage to Octavia will

inevitably end in disaster:

> He will to his Egyptian dish again. Then
> shall the sighs of Octavia blow the fire up in Caesar,
> And . . . that which is the strength of their
> amity shall prove the immediate author of their variance. (II.vi.126-130)

Similarly, in the third act, he wisely advises Antony not to fight by sea at Actium and it is he who later delivers the shattering news that Cleopatra has fled the battle with her sixty ships. As the play progresses Enobarbus increasingly earns the audience's respect; he is viewed as a man of wisdom and moderation. That Antony is able to attract such a sagacious man to his service is in itself an indication of his own excellence.

In the source Domitius abandons Antonius before Actium, where in the drama he is loyal to Antony throughout this crisis even though several of the allies have already defected and Canidius is preparing to "render/ [his] legions and [his] horse" to Caesar (III.x.32-33). His ultimate desertion comes during the night before the second-to-last skirmish between Antony and Caesar. Antony does not discover his absence until he is leaving for the field in the morning and a soldier bids him "Call for Enobarbus,/ He shall not hear thee, or from Caesar's camp/ Say 'I am none of thine.'" (IV.v.7-9). Geoffrey Bullough notes that this minor plot change is in fact significant because "Shakespeare makes [the defection] more poignant by placing it just before the catastrophe" (Bullough 245). The speech Enobarbus delivers later in the act when he discovers that his treasure has been sent after him is perhaps the best testimony of Antony's magnanimity:

O Antony,

> Thou mine of bounty, how wouldst thou have paid
> My better service, when my turpitude
> Thou dost so crown with gold! (IV.30-33)

Ultimately, as Bullough suggests, Enobarbus dies "heartsick no doubt but not 'sick of an ague' like Domitius" (Bullough 245).

As much as Shakespeare highlights Enobarbus's character in order to shed a favourable light on Antony, so does he downplay Octavia's character in an effort to achieve the same effect. In the source, Caesar's sister is a sensitive, agreeable character. North depicts her as being realms above Cleopatra, both in beauty and in mien:

> Ladie Octavia, having excellent grace, wisedom, and honestie, joined unto so rare a beawtie, that when she were with Antonius (he loving her as so worthy a Ladie deserveth) she should be a good meane to keepe good love and amitie betwext her brother and him. (Bullough 278)

Because of her gentle devotion to him, Octavia unwittingly becomes a foil to Antonius. In the source she petitions Caesar on Antonius's behalf not once, as she does in Shakespeare, but twice. Furthermore, on the first of these occasions she travels to Rome to pacify her brother while she is pregnant: "Octavia . . . was great with child, and moreover had a second daughter by [Antonius], and yet she put her selfe in jorney, and met with her brother Octavius Caesar . . ." (Bullough 282). When Caesar later commands her to leave Antonius's house "bicause he had abused her" Octavia gently chastises her brother for his "jealousy" and remains loyal to her husband even though Antonius is openly committing adultery with Cleopatra:

> she kept still in Antonius house, as if he had bene there, and very honestly and honorably kept his children, not

> those onely she had by him, but the other which her husband had by Fulvia. (Bullough 290)

In return for her faithfulness Octavia receives no consideration from her husband; indeed, Antonius eventually sends to Rome "to put his wife . . . out of his house" (Bullough 292-293). In the end the reader becomes just as outraged with Antonius's discourteous behaviour toward Octavia as do his Roman peers: "her honest love and regard to her husband, made every man hate him, when they sawe he did so unkindly use so noble a Lady" (Bullough 290). Ironically, North adds that while most Romans pitied Octavia some pitied Antonius more: "those specially that had seene Cleopatra: who nether excelled Octavia in beawtie, nor yet in young yeares" (Bullough 293).

Octavia is not omitted from the drama, but she is certainly modified. As MacCallum remarks, "many instances of Octavia's devotion, constancy and principle are passed over, and she is placed very much in the shade" (MacCallum 338). In the play she does not endear herself to the audience. Unlike Cleopatra, who is captivating in her vibrancy and sensuousness, Octavia is insipid. To this end MacCallum notes that

> there is no reference to the children that sprang from her union with Antony, indeed their existence is by implication denied, and she seems to be introduced as another Iseult of the White Hands. (McCallum 338)

Even Enobarbus offhandedly dismisses her in a conversation with Menas: "Octavia is of a holy, cold, and/ Still conversation" (II.vi.122-123). Thus Antony's treatment of his second wife is overlooked, if not forgiven, by the audience. In fact, it seems natural to us that Antony would not honour a

marriage divined merely to "knit together" Caesar and himself.

A further difference between the source and the drama can be observed in the titles of the two works, which are noteworthy because they announce the respective subjects of the texts they precede. North titles his history *The Life of Marcus Antonius* where Shakespeare names his drama after two persons, Antony *and* Cleopatra. As MacCallum observes, the play is so named because "the lovers have equal rights" (MacCallum 341). Accordingly, just as Shakespeare must soften Antony's character, so he must make Cleopatra's more palatable.

Perhaps the most remarkable change that Shakespeare makes to Cleopatra is that of enshrouding her in an aura of mystery. Throughout the play she remains an enigma, and many of her actions thus go unexplained. For example, in the source the reader discovers why she takes her barge on the river Cydnus when she is sent for by Antony:

> when she was sent unto by divers letters, both from Antonius him selfe, and also from his frendes, she make so light of it, and mocked Antonius so much, that she disdained to set forward otherwise . . . (Bullough 274)

Conversely, when Enobarbus is relating the same incident he does not tell his companions of either the occasion of the meeting or Cleopatra's reason for travelling upon the river in her barge. He merely paints a magnificent portrait of the mysterious Egyptian Queen and rounds his speech with a impressive statement regarding her incomparability to all other women:

> Age cannot wither her, nor custom stale
> Her infinite variety. Other women cloy
> The appetites they feed, but she makes hungry
> Where most she satisfies; for vildest things

> Become themselves in her, that the holy priests
> Bless her when she is riggish. (II.ii.234-239)

As a result, the audience is impressed not by her mocking attitude, but rather with the sense that this woman lying in her pavilion enveloped in tissue-like "cloth of gold" is a creature who certainly could not be a mere mortal.

Later in the text North again puts reason to action when he gives Cleopatra's motivation for flying from the battle at Actium. North notes that having "forced [Antony] to put all to the hazard of battel by sea," she began "considering with her selfe how she might flie, and provide for her safetie, not to helpe him to winne the victory, but to flie more easily after the battel lost" (Bullough 298). Understandably, the reader is not impressed with these antics and the passage merely condemns Cleopatra further in our eyes. This same action in the drama, however, is truly perplexing. The audience is more shocked than angry with Cleopatra. Certainly there is no indication before the battle that the Queen is plotting her escape. Furthermore, after the incident Cleopatra never fully explains her reason for flying and certainly Antony does little to seek it out. When her lover questions her, "whither hast thou led me, Egypt," Cleopatra mournfully cries:

> O my lord, my lord,
> Forgive my fearful sails! I little thought
> You would have followed. (III.xi.54-56).

Antony rebukes his lover, "Egypt, thou knew'st too well/ My heart was to thy rudder tied by th'strings," but in the end he accepts her apology, if not

her excuse, and bids her not be unhappy:

> Fall not a tear, I say, one of them rates
> All that is won and lost. Give me a kiss.
> Even this repays me. (III.xi.69-71)

The audience is left debating Cleopatra's motive: is she testing her lover's constancy at a particularly inopportune moment, has she simply lost interest in the contest, or is she truly frightened by the battle? Ultimately we can do little at this point in the drama but join Antony in his forgiveness of her.

Throughout the drama Cleopatra continues to be veiled in mystery–mystery which both befits an Egyptian Queen and makes her worthy of Antony's love. Unlike the hero, who reveals his purpose early in the drama, Cleopatra does not enlighten the audience to her purpose until the final act of the play. In retrospect we realize that she values her love for Antony even above her life, but part of her initial intrigue is the fact that we are never certain of her genuine feelings until she has resolved to die in order to be with her lover. Her ambiguity is illustrated in the fifth scene of the first act when she is discussing her "immeasurable" love for Antony with her handmaid. In a dreamy mood Cleopatra reflects on her first marriage, "Did I, Charmian,/ Ever love Caesar so" (I.v.66-67)? Her handmaid is unexpectedly revealing in her answer: "O that brave Caesar" (I.v.67)! When threatened with "bloody teeth" Charmian laughingly declares "By your most gracious pardon,/ I sing but after you" (I.v.72-73).

As Bullough asserts "there can be no doubt that Shakespeare intended us to see Cleopatra at first not as the noble Queen but as the royal

seductress full of feminine trickery" (Bullough 250). By portraying Cleopatra in this manner Shakespeare achieves an air of uncertainty that is lacking in North. The audience is kept in suspense until the end of the drama for we are never truly sure of the Egyptian Queen's intent until she reveals it just before she applies the asp to her breast: "*Husband* I come,/ Now to that name my courage prove my title" [italics mine] (V.ii.287-288).

By skilfully remodelling the material left him in the source Shakespeare has transformed North's relatively unremarkable history into a truly magnificent tragedy. As Joseph Satin asserts, the dramatist has taken the "rough outline" North provides him with for the characters of Antony and Cleopatra and has gone on "to idealize his hero and heroine and to set them in a near perfect balance of tension more sublime and vital than Plutarch ever suggests" (Satin 574). Ultimately, the crucial difference between the source and the drama lies in the respective outlooks of the authors. North tells his tale from the point of view of a moralist; he encourages his reader to be repulsed by Antonius's lewd attraction for an Egyptian coquette. Shakespeare, on the other hand, does not ask his audience to pass moral judgement on Antony and Cleopatra. Rather, he means us to see the dignity in their devotion to each other and to recognise that their deaths are indeed fitting for the "crown o'th' earth" and "a princess/ Descended of so many royal kings."

Chapter Two

Antony: "The Crown o'th' Earth."

In much of the commentary on *Antony and Cleopatra* which has accumulated over the past fifty years critics have channelled their energy into identifying abstract conflicts implicit in the drama. Such reviewers divide the characters into two camps: the Roman camp represented by Caesar and the Egyptian camp represented by Cleopatra.[3] A set of values is associated with each of these groups: Rome is identified with honour, while Egypt is identified with love, Rome is identified with the world, Egypt with the flesh. If this interpretation is carried to its extreme, the characters become little more than personified human qualities (Caesar, for example, is the personification of honour while Cleopatra is the personification of love). Antony, meanwhile, functions as a type of Everyman who must ultimately choose which allegorical figure will accompany him into death. Although this initially seems an interesting approach to the play, when it is applied its inadequacy becomes glaringly evident. Ultimately, an understanding of Antony's predicament and his final decision to follow Cleopatra into death can be achieved only if we recognise that the play is a naturalistic drama. As Antony Caputi asserts in

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[3] See especially Lawrence Edward Bowling. "Antony's Internal Disunity." *Studies in English Literature* 4 (1964): 239-246, John F. Danby. "The Shakespearean Dialectic." *Scrutiny* 16 (1949): 196-213, Michael Payne. "Erotic Irony and Polarity in *Antony and Cleopatra*." *Shakespeare Quarterly* 24 (1973): 265-279, and Eugene M. Waith. "Manhood and Valor in Two Shakespearean Tragedies." *ELH* 17 (1950): 262-273.

"*Antony and Cleopatra*: Tragedy Without Terror," Shakespeare is "at least as much interested in the substance of his characters' experience as in its abstract meaning" (Caputi 184). Antony, then, is a realistic portrayal of a man who is confronted with two extreme worlds, but who ultimately rises above the temptation to make a simple choice between them. Instead, he holds fast to values which mean more to him than life itself and in his death he is therefore victorious.

The polarities between the Roman and Egyptian worlds are first introduced in the beautifully engineered opening scene of the drama. Although this scene takes place in Egypt, the audience initially perceives it through Roman eyes. Philo's critical report of Antony's behaviour to Demetrius is the first indication that the two worlds are at odds:

> Those his goodly eyes
> That o'er the files and musters of the war
> Have glow'd like plated Mars, now bend, now turn
> Upon a tawny front; his captain's heart,
> Which in the scuffles of great fights hath burst
> The buckles on his breast, reneges all temper,
> And is become the bellows and the fan
> To cool a gipsy's lust. (I.i.1-10)

Within this prologue Philo protests that Antony's "Dotage . . . o'erflows the measure," and later that his "captain's heart . . . reneges all temper." In both cases nouns associated with restraint such as "measure" and "temper" are equated with Rome and are sharply contrasted with verbs identified with Egypt such as "o'erflows" and "reneges." The overall effect is one of continuing conflict: Rome sets boundaries, Egypt breaks them. This struggle is outlined by Michael Payne in his article "Erotic Irony and

Polarity in *Antony and Cleopatra*":

> Philo would have Antony carefully measure out his experience according to an absolute set of Roman standards . . .. Measure, authority, conquest, the setting [of] boundaries, and uniformity are the absolutes of the Roman world, as well as being the means for Roman success. Within the boundaries of the Roman empire is civilization, outside those boundaries is barbarism. But Egypt is a frontier, neither quite a part of the Roman empire, nor entirely immune from its influence. From the Roman point of view Egypt is a potential civilization, but it is as yet untamed. (Payne 266)

In their first short exchange, the lovers align themselves with the Egyptian world, for in their expression of immeasurable love for each other they reject "the Roman preoccupation with measure and boundary" (Payne 266):

> *Cleo.* If it be love indeed, tell me how much.
> *Ant.* There's beggary in the love that can be reckon'd.
> *Cleo.* I'll set a bourn how far to be belov'd.
> *Ant.* Then must thou needs find out new heaven, new earth.
> (I.i.14-17)

The audience has hardly had time to digest this discourse when a Roman messenger intrudes upon the Egyptian scene. It is not unnatural that Antony is irritated because the messenger not only falls upon him "ere admitted" as he later explains to Caesar, but he also arrives at a very intimate moment. In spite of his annoyance, however, he is prepared to hear "the sum" of the message until Cleopatra begins to tease him. If Antony is indecisive as to whether he should give audience to the messenger initially, his lover's sarcastic mandate quickly makes up his mind:

> You must not stay here longer, your dismission
> Is come from Caesar, therefore hear it, Antony.
> Where's Fulvia's process?--Caesar's, I would say--both?
> Call in the messengers. As I am Egypt's queen,
> Thou blushest, Antony, and that blood of thine

> Is Caesar's homager; else so thy cheek pays shame
> When shrill-tongu'd Fulvia scolds. (I.i.26-32)

Cleopatra's suggestion that Antony's very blood is "Caesar's homager" accompanied by her further reference to Fulvia's "shrill-tongu'd" authority over him is enough to provoke the hero's ardent reply. As John Danby observes in 'The Shakespearean Dialectic" "Antony's reaction is to pitch his romantic vows higher still, asserting his independence of Rome in terms that should leave no doubt as to where he stands" (Danby 199). Thus Antony insists:

> Let Rome in Tiber melt, and the wide arch
> Of the rang'd empire fall! Here is my space,
> Kingdoms are clay; our dungy earth alike
> Feeds beast as man; the nobleness of life
> Is to do thus [embracing]--when such a mutual pair
> And such a twain can do't, in which I bind,
> [On] pain of punishment, the world to weet
> We stand up peerless. (I.i.33-39)

For the Egyptian Queen this splendid declaration of love is a victory; her taunts have been effective and a few more half-hearted objections are all that is required to ensure that Antony will put aside his Roman thoughts for another night of revels. As Antony and Cleopatra exit, intent on wandering the streets and noting 'The qualities of people," the scene comes full circle. Yet now Demetrius and Philo's caustic remarks seem, as Danby observes, "peculiarly limited and out of place" (Danby 201). Nevertheless, Danby continues, they effectively serve

> to remind us . . . of the world that stands around the lovers, the world of the faithful soldier who can only understand the soldierly, the world of 'the common liar' that enjoys the unpleasant 'truth', the world, too, of Rome and Caesar that is radically opposed to the world

of Egypt and Cleopatra. (Danby 201)

The oppositions developed in the first sixty-two lines of the drama are implicit throughout the entire play. As Granville-Barker observes in *Prefaces to Shakespeare*, the dramatist "weaves [a] pattern . . . as he goes along, setting color against color, coarse thread by fine" (Granville-Barker 373). Indeed, even the scenes are juxtaposed in such a way that the action volleys rapidly between Rome and Egypt, ever keeping the vast differences in the philosophies of the two worlds alive in the audience's mind.

Without denying the fact that these abstract conflicts are present within the drama and that they do serve an important function, it is necessary to recognise the problems which arise if one becomes overly concerned with this aspect of the play. If, for example, Antony's soldiership is associated with honour and his relationship with Cleopatra with love, his death may be understood in one of two ways: the hero rightly chooses love and is victorious in death or he wrongly chooses love and his end is therefore well deserved.

Within the context of the allegorical approach to the play it would be unsatisfactory to accept either of these two views. That the hero sees his suicide not only as a way to join Cleopatra but also as a victory over Caesar is indicated when he asks Eros to dispatch him: "Do't, the time is come./ Thou strik'st not me, 'tis Caesar thou defeat'st" (IV.67-68). If, therefore, we accept the view that honour is associated with Caesar's camp and love with Cleopatra's, then Antony's conscious choice to defeat Caesar by following his lover into death must be understood as dishonourable.

It is not surprising, therefore, that several critics argue that Antony's death is well deserved. Indeed, this is the view that John Dryden adopts in his preface to *All for Love*: "the chief persons represented [are] famous patterns of unlawful love; and their end accordingly [is] unfortunate" (Brown 25). The same conclusion is reached by Harley Granville-Barker, who complains that Antony flings "honour and power" away for Cleopatra's sake, "never weighing their worth against her worthlessness" (Granville-Barker 434). To condemn Antony in this manner, however, is to insinuate either that honour and power are more valuable qualities to be in possession of than love, or that the hero's relationship with Cleopatra is merely lust. The first option, that honour and power are more valuable than love, is certainly questionable. Indeed, in the Bible love is heralded as the greatest of all virtues: "He that loveth not knoweth not God; for God is love" (1 John, 4:8). As to the second alternative, that Shakespeare did not intend his audience to view Antony's attraction to Cleopatra as mere lust is indicated repeatedly throughout the text.

Although Philo begins the drama by preparing us for the worst when he assures Demetrius that Antony's "captain's heart . . . is become the bellows and the fan/ To cool a gipsy's lust," his words are subtly contradicted as the play unfolds. With Philo's damning speech still ringing in the audience's ears, Antony and Cleopatra come on stage heralded by trumpets, amidst a crowd of servants and, appropriately, talking of the boundlessness of their love:

Cleo. If it be love indeed, tell me how much.

Ant. There's beggary in the love that can be reckon'd.
Cleo. I'll set a bourn how far to be belov'd.
Ant. Then must thou needs find out new heaven, new earth.
(I.i.14-17)

Antony's reference to finding out new heaven and new earth in the last line of this excerpt is an allusion to the twenty-first chapter of Revelation where John envisions the coming of the new Jerusalem after the final judgement:

> And I saw a new heaven and a new earth: for the first heaven and the first earth were passed away; and there was no more sea. And I John saw the holy city, new Jerusalem, coming down from God out of heaven, prepared as a bride adorned for her husband.
> (Revelation 21:1-2)

Thus, early on in the drama Shakespeare indicates that Antony's love for Cleopatra is sincere by equating it with the divine love described here by John. This is the first intimation that Philo is mistaken in his belief that his captain is merely lusting after the Egyptian Queen.

As the drama proceeds, Antony's love for Cleopatra is sharply contrasted with his treatment of Fulvia, historically his third wife, and Octavia, whom he takes as his fourth wife in the second act. That Antony cares little for either of these women is unquestionable. His reaction to Fulvia's unexpected death in the second scene is a mixture of relief and guilt (relief that she is finally dead, yet guilt over the fact that he had often wished her so):

> There's a great spirit gone! Thus did I desire it.
> What our contempts doth often hurl from us,
> We wish it ours again. The present pleasure,
> By revolution low'ring, does become
> The opposite of itself. She's good, being gone;
> The hand could pluck her back that shov'd her on.
> (I.ii.122-127)

When he later broaches the subject of his wife's death with Enobarbus the situation becomes quite comical. Enobarbus, well aware of his master's aversion to Fulvia, offers no undeserved sympathy but rather cheerfully bids him "give the gods a thankful sacrifice" and embarks upon a lengthy discourse on the uncanny ability of the "tailors of the earth" to provide new robes when "old robes are worn out" (I.ii.161-167).

Antony's marriage to Octavia is similarly not a bond of love. The match is a weak attempt to hold Antony and Caesar in "perpetual amity" and Antony never deludes the audience into thinking that he will honour the union. In fact, within moments of meeting Octavia, "whose beauty claims/ No worse a husband than the best of men" (II.ii.127-128), he declares his intent to return as quickly as possible to Cleopatra:

> I will to Egypt;
> And though I make this marriage for my peace,
> I' th' East my pleasure lies. (II.iii.39-41)

Antony is undeniably a womaniser and his inconsideration to Fulvia and Octavia reveals this uglier side of his character, yet it also serves to highlight the extent of his feeling for Cleopatra. Although he may attempt to break his "strong Egyptian fetters" occasionally (even as he has deserted so many women in his past) he inevitably returns to his "serpent of old Nile." Unlike Fulvia and Octavia, Cleopatra captures his imagination and he will never, as Maecenas proposes, "leave her utterly." The depth of his feeling for Cleopatra is illustrated beautifully in the following passage from A.C. Bradley's "Shakespeare's *Antony and Cleopatra*:"

> When [Antony] meets Cleopatra he finds his Absolute.

> She satisfies, nay glorifies, his whole being. She intoxicates his senses. Her wiles, her taunts, her furies and meltings, her laughter and tears, bewitch him all alike. She loves what he loves, and she surpasses him. She can drink him to his bed, out-jest his practical jokes, out-act the best actress who ever amused him, out-dazzle his own magnificence. She is his play-fellow, and yet a great queen. Angling in the river, playing billiards, flourishing the sword he used at Philippi, hopping forty paces in a public street, she remains an enchantress. Her spirit is made of wind and flame, and the poet in him worships her no less than the man. He is under no illusion about her, knows all her faults, sees through her wiles, believes her capable of betraying him. It makes no difference. She is his heart's desire made perfect. To love her is what he was born for. (Bradley 77-78)

And indeed, his love for her is what he ultimately dies for.

Thus, to accept any analysis of the play which suggests that Antony is lusting after Cleopatra and his end is therefore well deserved, is to render the drama virtually meaningless. On a purely technical level, as Philo supposedly diagnoses this problem in the first ten lines of the play when he informs the audience that Antony has become "the bellows and the fan/ To cool a gipsy's lust," the rest of the drama becomes superfluous. Surely four acts are not necessary to prepare the audience for the hero's inevitable fall, and why does Shakespeare waste the entire fifth act documenting the artifice of Cleopatra, the personification of "lust?" In his preface to *Three Plays for Puritans*, George Bernard Shaw attempts to skirt these issues by asserting that the dramatist was merely straining "all his huge command of rhetoric and stage pathos to give a theatrical sublimity to the wretched end of the whole business" (Shaw xxviii). "Woe to the poet who stoops to such folly," he emphatically adds, and thus dismisses the drama with a flourish

of his pen. It is more reasonable, however, to give Shakespeare credit where credit is due.

Perceiving the inevitable difficulties which arise if the hero is made to choose between allegorical representations of two seemingly irreconcilable values, Lawrence Edward Bowling offers a third reading of the text in "Antony's Internal Disunity." In this article he attempts to avoid the problems other critics have encountered in justifying the hero's choice by claiming that "Antony's greatest mistake was not that he failed to choose honour over love but that he kept the two interests "equal," thereby effecting the disunity by which he was destroyed" (Bowling 246). Bowling's interpretation draws the reader's attention to the fundamental error in stubbornly attempting to cast Antony into the Everyman role. Common to all of these arguments is the underlying assumption that honour and love are qualities which are diametrically opposed and that Antony must choose between them. Yet to suggest that Antony should choose between honour and love is to suggest, for example, that Odysseus should choose between Scylla and Charybdis. Clearly there is no preferred choice; the best route, in both cases, is to attempt to keep the "two interests 'equal.'"

Another factor which is common to such approaches to the play is a tendency to oversimplify the characters drastically. Antony, Caesar, Cleopatra and indeed the entire cast of characters are multifaceted. To say that Caesar and his followers epitomise honour is to insinuate that they are flawless, which they most definitely are not. Similarly, to argue that

Antony is a "soldier broken in debauchery" while Cleopatra is the "typical wanton in whose arms such men perish" (Shaw xxviii) is to deny the virtuous aspects of their characters. It is impossible to ignore the seamy side of Antony, yet by the end of the drama we are able to see his virtues as well as his faults. We see that it is possible to be honourable in both war and love and that the hero may ultimately reject Caesar and the Roman world, but he does not reject honour.

Nevertheless, at times throughout the drama it seems virtually impossible not to become frustrated with Antony's vacillation. At the beginning of the play he appears steadfast in his love for Cleopatra. "Let Rome in Tiber melt" he ardently declares, and firmly embraces the only person in the world of any consequence. Yet, in the following scene he is ashamed of his earlier negligence of Caesar's messenger and resolves to terminate the liaison which not moments ago was the centre of his being:

> I must from this enchanting queen break off;
> Ten thousand harms, more than the ills I know,
> My idleness doth hatch. (I.ii.130)

This resolution, however, is again short-lived, and as Antony leaves for Rome at the end of the third scene, his parting words to Cleopatra leave little doubt that he will return to his lover as soon as possible:

> Our separation so abides and flies,
> That thou residing here, goes yet with me;
> And I hence fleeting, here remain with thee.
> (I.iii.102-104)

Thus, by half way through the first act the audience is virtually spinning. Antony appears almost cowardly in his indecision. As Bradley observes, he

seems "prone to take the step that is easiest at the moment" (Bradley 77). Indeed, Caesar's description of the Roman populace in the fourth scene might just as easily be applied to Antony:

> This common body,
> Like to a vagabond flag upon the stream,
> Goes to and back, [lackeying] the varying tide,
> To rot itself with motion. (I.iv.44-47)

However, upon closer examination, Antony's wild vacillation between his dual roles of soldier and lover seems not to be rooted merely in a deplorable lack of judgement.

Instead, at the heart of the hero's indecision is his concern with honour. Unfortunately, however, Antony is caught in a situation where "doing the honourable thing" requires much contemplation. On the one hand is the rigid Roman world which promises the rewards which are traditionally associated with honour such as power, wealth and fame. On the other hand is the elusive Egyptian world which seems to represent little more than self-indulgence, luxury and licentiousness. Yet ironically Shakespeare has all but reversed the conventional classification in this play. Caesar, far from epitomising honour, is primarily motivated by his lust for power. He would have "one man but a man," namely himself, and will do almost anything to achieve this end. As the drama unfolds it becomes apparent that Caesar is biding his time. He initially accuses Antony of peccadillos instead of attacking him directly, because, as Pompey observes, the third pillar of the world's "soldiership/ Is twice the other twain." Thus, although his position is not strong enough to secure his absolute

dominion at once, Caesar is patient, and gradually lays the ground-work for his opponents' respective falls.

He begins this enterprise by agreeing to Agrippa's suggestion that Antony marry his sister. Caesar is utterly devious in his exploitation of Octavia. He bequeaths Antony "A sister . . . whom no brother/ Did ever love so dearly" and later weeps when she departs with her new husband. Yet, if Caesar is so fond of his sibling why does he give her to a man who, in his own words, is "th'[abstract] of all faults/ That all men follow," who tumbles "on the bed of Ptolemy," gives a "kingdom for a mirth," keeps "the turn of tippling with a slave" and reels in "the streets at noon" (I.iv.9-20)? Caesar is unquestionably aware that Antony will eventually return to Cleopatra and he is thus consciously sacrificing his sister's happiness in order to secure a mandate to turn later on his partner. Enobarbus astutely predicts this outcome even before the marriage has taken place:

> [Antony] will to his Egyptian dish again. Then shall the sighs of Octavia blow the fire up in Caesar,and . . . that which is the strength of their amity shall prove the immediate author of their variance. (II.vii.126-130).

Furthermore, Caesar is underhanded in his dealings with both Pompey and Lepidus. After Antony's return to Rome in the second act, he makes use of the triumvirate's combined strength to force a treaty on Pompey. When this agreement has been "written/ And seal'd" among the four leaders, however, Caesar dishonours it by enlisting Lepidus's help to attack Pompey anew following Antony's departure from Rome. Moreover, having been successful in this war, he then turns deviously on Lepidus. As

Eros reports to Enobarbus:

> Caesar, having made use of [Lepidus] in the wars 'gainst Pompey, presently denied him rivality, would not let him partake in the glory of the action, and not resting here, accuses him of letters he had formerly wrote to Pompey; upon his own appeal, seizes him. So the poor third is up, till death enlarge his confine. (III.v.6-12)

Caesar's treachery on these two counts is heightened by the display of genuine honour provided by Pompey during the banquet scene.

While he is feasting the three rulers of the Roman Empire on his galley, Pompey is presented with the opportunity to become "lord of all the world" by the pirate, Menas:

> Men. . . . though thou think me poor, I am the man
> Will give thee all the world.
> Pom. Hast thou drunk well?
> Men. No, Pompey, I have kept me from the cup.
> Thou art, if thou dar'st be, the earthly Jove.
> What e'er the ocean pales, or sky inclips,
> Is thine, if thou wilt ha't.
> Pom. Show me which way.
> Men. These three world-sharers, these competitors,
> Are in thy vessel. Let me cut the cable,
> And when we are put off, fall to their throats:
> All there is thine. (II.vii.66-73)

Significantly, Menas's words are remarkably similar to Satan's during the second temptation of Christ:

> And the devil taking him up into an high mountain, shewed unto him all the kingdoms of the world in a moment of time. And the devil said unto him, All this power will I give thee, and the glory of them: for that is delivered unto me; and to whomsoever I will I give it. (Luke 4:5-6)

Although Pompey is unlike Christ in that he clearly covets the opportunity to become ruler of the world, he displays similar uprightness when he

declines Menas's offer on the grounds that such an action would be dishonourable:

> Ah, this thou shouldst have done,
> And not have spoke on't! In me 'tis villainy,
> In thee't had been good service. Thou must know,
> 'Tis not my profit that does lead mine honor;
> Mine honor, it. (II.vii.73-77)

Thus, it is ironic when, having just freed Caesar from certain death, Pompey's quarry then turns on him and savagely falls to his throat. The parallel is made even more poignant when we realize that Pompey's act of mercy has in fact left him open to this attack because Menas, who is one of his strongest allies, leaves him when his advice is not heeded: "For this,/ I'll never follow thy pall'd fortunes more" (II.vii.81-82).

The final example of Caesar's cunning comes after Antony's death in the fifth act when he attempts to deceive Cleopatra into thinking she will be safe in his custody. He tells an Egyptian messenger to inform his mistress how "honorable and how kindly we/ Determine for her; for Caesar cannot [live]/ To be ungentle" (V.i.58-60). The Egyptian has barely left the stage, however, when Caesar turns to Proculeius with the following orders:

> Go and say
> We purpose her no shame. Give her what comforts
> The quality of her passion shall require,
> Lest in her greatness, by some mortal stroke
> She do defeat us; for her life in Rome
> Would be eternal in our triumph. (V.i.61-66)

Caesar's duplicity may eventually secure him the Roman Empire, but it does little to gain him any esteem in the audience's eyes. Far from epitomising honour, Caesar proves to be cold, relentless and at times utterly

unscrupulous.

Antony, on the other hand, is very much the opposite in that, like Pompey, he puts honour before profit. In fact, if asked to single out which aspect of Antony's character contributes most greatly to his downfall, one would inevitably have to indicate his concern with honour, for it is this which is most frequently at the root of his vacillation. Within the drama two views of honour are exhibited. Caesar measures honour in terms of achievement and outward appearances, while Antony measures honour in terms of nobleness of mind. As a result, Caesar is able to plow his way to the pinnacle of the Roman Empire, heedless of his deceit, while Antony remains acutely conscious of the implications of both his own and his companions' actions.

Yet, it is necessary to preface any further remarks about Antony's concern with honour by acknowledging that there is a seamy side to him which cannot be ignored. As previously mentioned, Antony is a hedonist. Unlike the staunch Caesar, the hero is a man who lives for the moment. Bradley sums up Antony's character masterfully in the following passage:

> his nature tends to splendid action and lusty enjoyment. . . . He has imagination, the temper of an artist who revels in abundant and rejoicing appetites, feasts his senses on the glow and richness of life, flings himself into its mirth and revelry, yet feels the poetry in all this, and is able also to put it by and be more than content with the hardships of adventure. . . . He enjoys being a great man, but he has not the love of rule for rule's sake. Power for him is chiefly a means to pleasure. The pleasure he wants is so huge that he needs a huge power; but half the world, even a third of it , would suffice. He will not pocket wrongs, but he shows not the slightest wish to get rid of his fellow Triumvirs and

reign alone. (Bradley 76-77)

Although Bradley has captured the essence of Antony's being in this passage, he is wrong to suggest at another point in his argument that the hero is an "elect spirit colliding, partly through [his] error and defect, with a superhuman power which bears [him] down" (Bradley 74). Instead, in this play, perhaps more than in any other Shakespearean play, we become aware that, as the dramatist himself observes in *Measure for Measure*, the

> . . . best men are moulded out of faults,
> And for the most, become much more the better
> For being a little bad. (*M.M.* V.i.439-441)

Antony may neglect Fulvia and marry but "his occasion" in Octavia, he may put off his duties in Rome while feasting in Egypt; yet, in spite of all this, he is loved by his soldiers and praised by his colleagues. Lepidus insists that there are not

> Evils enow to darken all his goodness:
> His faults, in him, seem as the spots of heaven,
> More fiery by night's blackness; hereditary,
> Rather than purchas'd; what he cannot change,
> Than what he chooses. (I.iv.10-15)

Even Caesar, who rails against Antony throughout most of the drama, concedes after his suicide that he was an exceptional man whose death "Should have shook lions into civil streets,/ And citizens to their dens" (V.i.16-17). Thus, while it is impossible to deny Antony's faults, it is apparent that Shakespeare wanted the audience to look beyond his hero's shortcomings and to see, in Henry V's words, that "There is some soul of goodness in things evil,/ Would men observingly distill it out" (*Henry V*, IV.i.4-5).

In Antony this "soul of goodness" is his concern with honour. The hero views honour on two different levels: on the one hand he is concerned with whether his actions as a soldier and a leader are honourable and on the other he is concerned with whether or not Cleopatra is being honourable in love. It is his honour as a soldier that is at stake in the first two acts of the play. As the drama begins Antony has been in Cleopatra's company for some time and hence he has been neglecting his duties as husband, warrior and ruler. In the first scene he is so caught up in his love for Cleopatra that he ignores Caesar's messenger. His feeling of shame over his disrespect to Caesar's "missive" is displayed in the subsequent scene when he attentively listens to the troubled news from Rome. Ironically, each piece of information the messenger relays is a stinging reminder to him of his recent neglect of his duty. Not only has Antony failed to come to the aid of his allies in the recent wars against Rome, but by slighting his wife he has been the "ignorant motive" of these same wars. Furthermore, while he has been off wasting "The lamps of night in revel" (I.iii.5), Labienus has conquered several of the Roman provinces in Asia. Thus, by the end of the messenger's discourse, Antony acutely feels his shame and resolves to depart for Rome or "lose [himself] in dotage." As if to cement this decision in his mind, a second messenger bearing news of Fulvia's death comes hard on the heels of the first and Antony's degradation is complete. The fact that Fulvia dies before he has had a chance to redeem his honour somewhat is the blow that rouses; the hero calls out for Enobarbus and arranges "Our quick remove from hence."

Although Cleopatra initially uses all her wiles and trickery to prevent her lover from leaving her, she ultimately displays her understanding of the motive behind Antony's decision:

> Your honour calls you hence,
> Therefore be deaf to my unpitied folly,
> And all the gods go with you! Upon your sword
> Sit laurel victory, and smooth success
> Be strew'd before your feet! (I.iii.95-101)

By the beginning of the third act, Antony's honour, which previously beckoned him to Rome, is pulling him in another direction. Caesar has dishonoured the triumvirate's treaty with Pompey and has spoken "scantly" of Antony to the public ear. As Bradley asserts, the hero "will not pocket wrongs" (Bradley 77) and is thus moved to prepare for war. As he explains in his parting words to Octavia: "If I lose mine honor,/ I lose myself; better I were not yours/ Than [yours] so branchless" (III.iv.22-24). At this point the hero is still very much concerned with his reputation as a soldier. It is not until later, at the battle of Actium, that the audience captures the first glimpse of his concern with honour in love.

During this battle, Antony's two perceptions of honour come in direct conflict. In deserting his fleet, the hero loses the universal respect he has gained as a warrior. Initially, he is beside himself with shame and bids his followers "Be gone." When Cleopatra arrives one would expect his rage to surface, yet he is relatively subdued. In this scene it becomes apparent that Antony's pain is more a result of his thinking that Cleopatra has been dishonourable in her love for him than it is a result of his having incurred dishonour by deserting his soldiers. Significantly, Cleopatra offers little by

way of explanation for her behaviour; she merely asks Antony to "Forgive [her] fearful sails" and begs his pardon. Antony does not pursue this point because, to him, it is not important. What he wants from Cleopatra at this time is an indication that she loves him in a way that is both sincere and honest. To Antony, Caesar's world is trivial compared to such a love and he indicates as much as he wipes Cleopatra's tears away:

> Fall not a tear, I say, one of them rates
> All that is won and lost. Give me a kiss.
> Even this repays me. (III.xi.69-71)

The hero's concern with whether his lover is being true to him is illustrated again later in the drama when Caesar sends Thidias to Egypt to attempt to win over Cleopatra. Antony's actions in this scene can, as in the scene following the battle at Actium, be interpreted on two levels. On the one hand, his behaviour is abominable. Perhaps Caesar's messenger is overstepping his boundaries somewhat when he kisses the queen's hand, but nevertheless, to whip him seems excessively cruel, especially when the man has been given permission to perform the very offence for which he is being whipped. Thidias, however, is the unfortunate recipient of a rage that is really meant for Cleopatra. When Antony comes across his lover accepting "favors" from Caesar's messenger, he is not furious so much at the messenger's gesture, as at what it signifies. Antony has just forgiven Cleopatra for her seeming unfaithfulness at Actium and now he finds her paying homage to Caesar. As previously, he is hurt because he fears that she is not honouring their relationship.

This fear overcomes the hero again following Caesar's final victory.

After this battle Antony believes that Cleopatra has given the order for her fleet to yield to Caesar. Her supposed treachery has confirmed what he had previously only suspected, that she has been false to his love:

> Betray'd I am.
> O this false soul of Egypt! this grave charm,
> Whose eye beck'd forth my wars and call'd them home,
> Whose bosom was my crownet, my chief end,
> Like a right gipsy, hath at fast and loose
> Beguil'd me to the very heart of loss.
> . . . To the young Roman boy she hath sold me, and I fall
> Under this plot. She dies for't. (Iv.xii.24-30,48-49)

At this point Antony appears very much like Othello who, having been tricked into thinking that his wife has committed adultery, concludes that she must be punished for her transgression:

> It is the cause, it is the cause, my soul;
> Let me not name it to you, you chaste stars,
> It is the cause. Yet I'll not shed her blood,
> Nor scar that whiter skin of hers than snow,
> And smooth as monumental alablaster.
> Yet she must die, else she'll betray more men.
> (V.ii.1-6)

Antony, like Othello, upholds honour in love as the highest of all values. Although he may have been insincere in his past affairs with women, the hero sees something more than mere physical compatibility in his relationship with Cleopatra and had hoped that his love was being reciprocated. As he comments following the battle: "I made these wars for Egypt, and the Queen,/ Whose heart I thought I had, for she had mine" (IV.xiv.16-17).

When Mardian tells Antony of his mistress's death the hero falls silent in the overpowering realization that Cleopatra has indeed been true to

him. He has misjudged her harshly and in doing so he feels that he has been profoundly dishonourable. As he confides to Eros: "Since Cleopatra died/ I have liv'd in such dishonor that the gods/ Detest my baseness" (IV.xiv.55-57). Like Othello after he discovers Desdemona's honesty, Antony too has no resolution but to die: "Unarm, Eros, the long day's task is done,/ And we must sleep" (IV.xiv.35-36). Thus, content in the realization that Cleopatra has been faithful to him, Antony puts aside the nagging doubts he has had about her character. As Bowling observes:

> Having been long divided between two conflicting views of Cleopatra, Antony now reaches a final decision; and this final decision about her character and motives enables him to make a definite choice between his dual objectives--to be a soldier and to be a lover. Taking off his armour and laying it aside, he remarks that he will be "no more a soldier." (Bowling 245)

Instead, he will be "A bridegroom in [his] death, and run into't/ As to a lover's bed" (IV.xiv.99-101).

After wounding himself fatally, however, Antony discovers that Cleopatra is still alive. Yet, surprisingly, he is not angered by this news. Diomede's explanation that the hero's accusations were unfounded and that Cleopatra had no other course to follow but to feign death until her lover's temper had subsided suffices to reconfirm Antony's former notion that his anger was unjustified. Thus, convinced that she has not betrayed him, he asks to be carried into her presence. With his dying words, Antony indicates that he does not regret his death:

> The miserable change now at my end
> Lament nor sorrow at; but please your thoughts
> In feeding them with those my former fortunes

> Wherein I liv'd, the greatest prince o'th' world,
> The noblest; and do now not basely die,
> Not cowardly put off my helmet to
> My countryman--a Roman by a Roman
> Valiantly vanquish'd. Now my spirit is going,
> I can no more. (IV.xv.51-59)

As Granville-Barker observes, the hero had "won much from the world, so he had much to lose" (Granville-Barker 435); nevertheless, he dies contented in the realization that he has, in life as in death, remained true to the values which he held most dear.

At the last it becomes apparent that Antony may eventually give up his soldiership for love, but he never gives up his honour, for in his eyes, true love cannot exist without honour. One is reminded of Lovelace's words to Lucasta, which could as easily have been Antony's to Cleopatra: "I could not love thee, dear, so much,/ Loved I not honor more." Ultimately, while the hero is undeniably less than perfect, there is a beauty in his character which shines through his imperfections. It is impossible not to feel regret at the passing of so great a soul, and yet the audience finds comfort in the knowledge that, having held true to his values throughout his lifetime, Antony becomes victorious even in death.

Chapter Three

Cleopatra: "A Princess Descended."

Shakespeare's Cleopatra might easily be proclaimed the most controversial woman in all English literature; indeed, critics rarely arrive at a consensus regarding her character except to acknowledge that her behaviour is frequently baffling. Levin L. Schücking complains that Shakespeare has failed in his characterization of her because the "Cleopatra of the first three Acts entirely contradicts the Cleopatra of the last two Acts" (Schücking 132). Conversely, E.E. Stoll insists that "In her inconsistency she is consistent" (Stoll 153). G. Wilson Knight argues that she is "typical of woman trying to hold man from other interests, other calls" (Knight 295), while Linda Fitz assures us:

> It is surely questionable whether there is such a thing as a "typical woman" or even a "typical Elizabethan woman." And if there is such a thing as a "typical Shakespearean woman," Cleopatra is not the woman. (Fitz 299)

Whatever the audience's ultimate opinion of Cleopatra, whether it be negative or positive, Fitz's caution that we refrain from seeing her as "typical" of anything is certainly good advice.

That Shakespeare did not want us to view Cleopatra this way is indicated by the changes he makes to Plutarch's characterization of the heroine which are discussed in Chapter one (pp. 21-24). The most important of these, as mentioned previously, is the dramatist's effort to

enshroud Plutarch's predictably selfish Cleopatra in an aura of mystery. Hence, while Plutarch explains the motives behind many of her actions, Shakespeare either fails to put reason to action at all, as in the Actium battle scene, or he gives her seemingly contradictory motives, as exhibited during III.xiii, when Cleopatra virtually sells herself to Caesar in one moment and then takes offence at the suggestion that she is being untrue to Antony in the next:

> Ant. Cold-hearted toward me?
> Cleo. Ah, dear, if I be so,
> From my cold heart let heaven engender hail,
> And poison it in the source, and the first stone
> Drop in my neck; as it determines, so
> Dissolve my life! The next Caesarion [smite],
> Together with my brave Egyptians all,
> By the [discandying] of this peleted storm,
> Lie graveless, till the flies and gnats of Nile
> Have buried them for prey! (III.xiii.158-167)

Because of her elusive nature, Cleopatra is very much an enigma, both to all of the other characters in the play and to the audience. The stoical Enobarbus speaks with awe of her "infinite variety." Caesar, whose logical mind can outwit the best of his opponents, and who takes every precaution in the last act to ensure that she does not escape him, is ultimately duped by the mysterious Queen. The only characters in the drama who seem to understand her are Charmian and Iras, perhaps because they share with their mistress a mysterious bond of blood and race. They attend her in all her moods, bolstering her spirits when she is disposed to merriment and consoling her in depression. Their lives exactly mirror hers, as do their deaths. Yet, despite their closeness to her, even Charmian and

Iras are sometimes baffled by their queen. Charmian's confusion regarding her mistress's behaviour is demonstrated in the first act when she tells Cleopatra that she will lose Antony if she continues to be so elusive and suggests, instead, that the Queen be more submissive: "In each thing give him way, cross him in nothing" (I.iii.9). Cleopatra merely laughs at this absurd advice and informs Charmian that she teaches "like a fool: the way to lose him" (I.iii.10). And, indeed, she is right, for although her antics may confuse even her closest friends, Shakespeare makes it clear that much of Cleopatra's attraction for Antony is her unpredictability, her extravagant moodiness, her "infinite variety," to use Enobarbus's phrase.

Cleopatra, then, perhaps as a result of her Egyptian background, is very much a play actress. She flits effortlessly from mood to mood, affecting whatever emotion she feels her present situation demands. While this aspect of her character is evident through the entire drama, it is perhaps best illustrated in II.v, where she attacks an unfortunate messenger after receiving news of Antony's marriage to Octavia, and also in this scene's sequel, III.iii, where the messenger returns to report Octavia's features, years and disposition.

As the first of these scenes begins, the Queen is discontentedly casting about for some pastime to amuse her while Antony is in Rome. She calls for music but then rejects the possibility almost before the words have passed her lips, resolving to play "billards" instead. This resolution, however, is also short lived; after a moment's reflection Cleopatra suggests that the group adjourn to the river for some angling. Although she

becomes animated briefly when Charmian reminds her of the tricks she used to play with Antony, she completely shakes off her lethargy only when a messenger arrives from Rome: "O, from Italy!/ Ram thou thy fruitful tidings in mine ears,/ That long time have been barren" (II.v.23-25). Again, however, her mood is momentary; when she observes that the messenger is agitated, her joy vanishes and she instantly affects a sober, yet distinctly threatening manner. She is like a volcano preparing to erupt: although she exudes a cold, dispassionate air, internally she is seething. As she proceeds to interview the messenger the tension mounts until, by the time the unfortunate man is ready to relay his news, there is no question in both the other characters' and the audience's mind that Cleopatra's reaction, whatever it may be, will be spectacular. With a masterful dramatic stroke Shakespeare further heightens the full effect of Cleopatra's pending fury by leaving the audience and the other characters some time to digest the servant's final piece of information. Thus, Cleopatra does not react immediately; she becomes pale and quiet first: a moment which must seem like an eternity to the nervous messenger:

> *Cleo.* Prithee, friend,
> Pour out the pack of matter to mine ear,
> The good and bad together: he's friends with Caesar,
> In state of health thou say'st, and thou say'st free.
> *Mess.* Free, madam, no; I made no such report.
> He's bound unto Octavia.
> *Cleo.* For what good turn?
> *Mess.* For the best turn i'th'bed.
> *Cleo.* I am pale, Charmian. (II.v.53-59)

Perhaps mistaking Cleopatra's momentary calm for resignation, the messenger summons his courage and repeats his announcement, thereby

breaking the Queen's trance and unleashing her full wrath upon himself:

> *Mess.* Madam, he's married to Octavia.
> *Cleo.* The most infectious pestilence upon thee!
> *Strikes him down.*
> *Mess.* Good madam, patience.
> *Cleo.* What say you? *Strikes him.* Hence,
> Horrible villain, or I'll spurn thine eyes
> Like balls before me; I'll unhair thy head,
> *She hales him up and down.*
> Thou shalt be whipt with wire, and stew'd in brine,
> Smarting in ling'ring pickle. (II.v.60-66)

As the scene progresses and Cleopatra regains control of her temper, she moves through another series of moods. First she rebukes herself for striking the messenger, then she exhibits a subdued resignation to the situation; next she voices regret at ever having loved Antony, and finally, with surprising suddenness, her energy drains away and she becomes so weak that she must be helped from the stage by her servants; in one moment she is a full-grown lioness venting her rage on an unsuspecting intruder and in the next a mere whelp, unable even to stand without assistance.

Not surprisingly, when the messenger returns in III.iii to give his mistress a description of Antony's new wife, he has become wise to the ways of the Egyptian world. This scene is laden with irony; the messenger is telling Cleopatra exactly what she wants to hear and the Queen is perfectly aware that he is doing so. Meanwhile, Charmian, long acquainted with this type of game, interjects comments at the appropriate moments. The messenger has become a player on the Egyptian Queen's stage, and apart from his slight blunder in guessing Octavia's age at thirty, (which

undoubtedly would cause his mistress's face to cloud over briefly), he performs his part admirably. Cleopatra finds him "fit for business" and sends him on his way with a handful of gold.

Cleopatra may play act, but she is not a superficial woman. Despite her seemingly frivolous exterior she has a profound knowledge of human nature. As Knight observes, she has the "ability to act any part to gain or retain hold over Antony's heart" (Knight 292). In the drama's opening scene, which is discussed briefly in chapter two, her awareness of human nature is clearly exhibited as she attempts to divert her lover's mind from Roman concerns. When Antony gruffly asks a Roman messenger for only "the sum" of his message, Cleopatra quickly intercedes:

> Nay, hear them, Antony.
> Fulvia perchance is angry; or who knows
> If the scarce-bearded Caesar have not sent
> His pow'rful mandate to you: "Do this, or this;
> Take in that kingdom, and enfranchise that;
> Perform't, or else we damn thee." (I.i.19-24)

She chooses her words carefully, knowing full well that Fulvia and Caesar are virtually the only two people in the Roman empire who exercise any power over her lover and knowing that by suggesting his subservience to them she will strengthen his desire to prove his independence. By aiming her verbal arrows carefully at Antony's Achilles heel (or heels, for in this case he has two: Fulvia and Caesar) she initially throws her quarry completely off guard at line twenty-four and then, with her continued assaults, neatly ambushes him into speaking the very words she had hoped to hear: "Let Rome in Tiber melt . . .." She further fortifies her strategy by

using reverse psychology: the more she insists that he hear the messengers, the stronger his resolution not to hear them becomes, until finally he dismisses them without even listening to "the sum" which he had initially intended to hear:

> *Cleo.* Hear the ambassadors.
> *Ant.* Fie, wrangling queen!
> Whom every thing becomes--to chide, to laugh,
> To weep: [whose] every passion fully strives
> To make itself (in thee) fair and admir'd!
> No messenger but thine, and all alone,
> To-night we'll wander through the streets and note
> The qualities of people. Come, my queen,
> Last night you did desire it. [*To the Messenger.*] Speak
> not to us. (I.i.48-55)

Thus Cleopatra expertly finesses the king, yet she does so without his being even remotely aware that he has been taken.

In I.iii the audience is given another example of Cleopatra's cunning. This scene is typical of her ability to pass through a variety of moods with amazing rapidity, but here again we can plainly see the astuteness of the mind at work behind the performance. As Knight observes: "she knows the limitations of her magic, works within them, employing a conscious artistry to serve her instinctive passion" (Knight 296). As the scene begins the Queen, irritated because she perceives that "a Roman thought" has struck Antony, sends Alexas to find him with the following instructions:

> See where he is, who's with him, what he does.
> I did not send you. If you find him sad,
> Say I am dancing; if in mirth, report
> That I am sudden sick. Quick, and return.
> (I.iii.2-5)

Fitz claims that this passage represents Cleopatra's "blueprint for action":

> Cleopatra's behaviour here, far from being incomprehensible, is so obvious as to be almost crude: having bound herself to performing, not what is unexpected, but what is exactly the opposite of the expected, she has allowed herself no scope for creativity whatsoever. Milton's Satan, by vowing to oppose whatever God initiates, renders himself dependent on God's will; similarly, Shakespeare's Cleopatra, by obliging herself to determine what Antony expects and then to do the opposite, will very soon forfeit the element of surprise in all her actions. (Fitz 316)

In spite of Fitz's observations Cleopatra's behaviour throughout the rest of this scene and, indeed, throughout the remainder of the drama, is hardly predictable. Cleopatra does not determine what is expected and then proceed to do the opposite; she simply governs from start to finish. Antony cannot get a sentence in edgewise once his lover has begun her bid to keep him in Egypt. When he first approaches she threatens to faint, then she begins to rebuke and mock him, accusing him of being ruled by Fulvia:

> What, says the married woman you may go?
> Would she had never given you leave to come!
> Let her not say 'tis I that keep you here,
> I have no power upon you; hers you are.
> (I.iii.20-23)

When Antony thwarts this line of attack by informing her of Fulvia's death, Cleopatra is momentarily surprised, but quickly regains her composure and begins her verbal assault anew making full use of Antony's latest disclosure and showing an amazing affinity with the woman whom she so recently slighted:

> O most false love!
> Where be the sacred vials thou shouldst fill
> With sorrowful water? Now I see, I see,
> In Fulvia's death, how mine receiv'd shall be.
> (I.iii.62-65)

She continues in this vein, however, only until she knows that she has tried Antony's patience to its limit and that he is on the verge of leaving in frustration, at which point she gives way to a burst of pathos:

> Courteous lord, one word:
> Sir, you and I must part, but that's not it;
> Sir, you and I have lov'd, but there's not it;
> That you know well. Something it is I would–
> O, my oblivion is a very Antony,
> And I am all forgotten. (I.iii.86-91)

Where she may have affected all the false moods preceding this outburst, the sincerity of the emotion behind her play-acting now becomes evident. As Knight observes, her love for Antony "is seen true in this sudden abandon, a roseate sincerity swiftly unfurled, the flower to which her other moods are as unopened buds" (Knight 295). Although Enobarbus is speaking partly with tongue in cheek, his words to Antony from the preceding scene now seem both fitting and sincere:

> . . . her passions are made of nothing but the finest part of pure love. We cannot call her winds and waters sighs and tears; they are greater storms and tempests than almanacs can report. This cannot be cunning in her; if it be, she makes a show'r of rain as well as Jove. (I.ii.144-151)

In spite of such glimpses of her true love for Antony, for a good portion of the play the audience remains uncertain as to whether the heroine's motives are honest. Unlike Plutarch, who continuously passes judgement on Cleopatra and thus helps the reader to a decision regarding her moral worth, Shakespeare steps back and leaves the consideration of her character to the audience. As a result there is a great deal of suspense present in the drama which is not evident in North's version of the story,

because for the first four acts of the play it is impossible to determine whether Cleopatra's love for Antony is genuine. At times she seems completely devoted to him, yet at others she appears all too willing to jeopardize their entire situation. Indeed, it is virtually impossible not to wonder at her motives during some of the scenes in the latter half of the drama. Particularly questionable are her actions during the Actium battle scene, her dealings with Caesar's messenger, Thidias, and her possible involvement in the yielding of the Egyptian fleet to Caesar which results in Antony's final military downfall. Yet noticeably, in none of these cases is the evidence against her conclusive.

In the first situation Cleopatra certainly jeopardizes her lover's position, but whether she does so intentionally is doubtful. When Antony questions her about her actions she is distraught:

> O my lord, my lord,
> Forgive my fearful sails! I little thought
> You would have followed. (III.xi.54-56)

Considering that Cleopatra is a Queen, and that as such she undoubtedly would have overseen one or two battles before in her lifetime, it seems hard to believe that she would be so frightened on this occasion that she would suddenly hoist sail and fly. Antony certainly appears dubious of her explanation. Yet, is this consideration relevant anyway? Perhaps she was frightened, perhaps she was testing her lover's constancy, perhaps she was merely bored; regardless of her motive, she cannot ultimately be blamed for Antony's decision to follow her, and Shakespeare makes this perfectly clear when the Queen is discussing the event with Enobarbus later in the

drama:

> *Cleo.* Is Antony or we in fault for this?
> *Eno.* Antony only, that would make his will
> Lord of his reason. What though you fled
> From that great face of war, whose several ranges
> Frighted each other? Why should he follow?
> The itch of his affection should not then
> Have nick'd his captainship, at such a point,
> When half the world oppos'd, he being
> The mered question. (III.xiii.3-10)

Ultimately, then, the incident gives the audience no concrete evidence that Cleopatra is betraying Antony; it merely adds to the mystery surrounding her character.

The second scene which is usually cited as evidence of Cleopatra's infidelity is III.xiii, where she appears to attempt to desert Antony in favour of Caesar. Knight speaks of this scene as the "pivot moment" of the play (Knight 303). He asserts that here we see Cleopatra's true nature revealed:

> Octavia and all Rome will scorn this love-madness of a once noble soldier, now gipsy-betrayed by woman's cheating lure. . . . Cleopatra is all womankind . . .. [She is] The serpent of old Nile. This is the primal Eve in Cleopatra. It is a serpentine evil, an utterly selfish streak of bottomless evil. (Knight 303-304)

There is no question that Cleopatra seems to be deceiving Antony in this scene. Indeed, she openly bids Caesar's messenger to pay homage to his master in her name:

> Most kind messenger,
> Say to great Caesar this in [deputation]:
> I kiss his conqu'ring hand. Tell him, I am prompt
> To lay my crown at 's feet, and there to kneel.
> Tell him, from his all-obeying breath I hear
> The doom of Egypt. (III.xiii.73-78)

Nevertheless, Knight's assessment of the episode is not only flagrantly sexist,

but it fails to take into account the remainder of the drama which indicates in no uncertain terms that Cleopatra would never sell herself to Caesar. To the Egyptian Queen Octavius is a mere boy. She refers to him as "the scarce-bearded Caesar" in the first act, and declares that "'Tis paltry to be Caesar" in the last. Furthermore, as Cleopatra refuses to pay homage to Octavius after her lover's death, it seems odd that she would do so now, in the presence of his confidant, Enobarbus, while Antony himself is quite probably wandering around in one of the adjoining chambers. The scene is disturbing because the Queen does appear to be betraying her lover, but in fact, as Antony cuts her communication with the messenger short, we never find out what her ultimate reaction would have been. Cleopatra is an actress; it is therefore quite possible that she is setting this messenger up just as she set up the unfortunate messenger in the second act. When Antony accuses her of flattering Caesar she does not go to great lengths to rationalise her actions (although the situation would seem to demand such a response), she merely retorts "Not know me yet" (III.xiii.157)? Thus, although it is impossible to confirm that she is not truly thinking of deserting Antony at this point, it is equally impossible to prove that, given the chance, she would fly to Caesar's camp. Again, the evidence against her is inconclusive and Shakespeare manages to keep the audience in suspense.

The final incident where Cleopatra's character comes into question does not take place before the audience; it is merely alluded to by Antony. In IV.xii the hero comes storming onto the stage following the last of his

battles with Caesar:

> All is lost!
> This foul Egyptian hath betrayed me.
> My fleet hath yielded to the foe, and yonder
> They cast their caps up and carouse together
> Like friends long lost. Triple-turn'd whore! 'tis thou
> Hast sold me to this novice, and my heart
> Makes only wars on thee. Bid them all fly;
> For when I am reveng'd upon my charm,
> I have done all. (IV.xii.9-17)

Antony's opinion of the situation, however, is not confirmed by any of the other characters. Indeed, during the subsequent scene Diomedes suggests rather the opposite when he is explaining Cleopatra's position to his dying master:

> when she saw
> (Which never shall be found) you did suspect
> She had dispos'd with Caesar, and that your rage
> Would not be purg'd, she sent you word she was dead . . ..
> (IV.xiv.121-124)

If Shakespeare had truly wanted to establish Cleopatra's guilt in this incident, he need only have had her speak an aside detailing her involvement, or had one of the other characters confirm Antony's suspicions. In fact, he does neither. The audience is left wondering. Centuries of criticism have not resolved the question. The truth is that there simply is no explanation provided.

What is apparent, however, (and this in itself might be cited as evidence that the Queen is not guilty of ordering her fleet over to Caesar) is that Cleopatra is bewildered by Antony's behaviour. When she encounters the hero after the yielding of the fleet she spends only a moment in his presence before she realizes that he is incensed and requests an explanation:

"Why is my lord enrag'd against his love" (IV.xii.31)? In reply Antony pours a deluge of threats and insults over her and for once she is caught dumbfounded. There is no time for play-acting. If she truly was frightened during the Actium battle scene she is ten times so now. Without a word she runs from the room to consult with her attendants.

The evidence that she does not intend to drive her lover to suicide by feigning her own death comes in the short scene that follows her encounter with the infuriated Antony. Noticeably, it is not Cleopatra who masterminds the fatal plan to flee to the monument. She is frightened, bewildered. She asks her servants for guidance and hastily accepts the first piece of advice that comes her way:

> *Cleo.* Help me, my women! O, he's more mad
> Than Telamon for his shield; the boar of Thessaly
> Was never so emboss'd.
> *Char.* To th' monument!
> There lock yourself, and send him word you are dead.
> The soul and body rive not more in parting
> Than greatness going off.
> *Cleo.* To th' monument! (IV.xiii.1-6)

Furthermore, it is Cleopatra who later perceives the possible flaw in Charmian's plan and sends word to Antony that she is still alive.

Thus it is difficult either to convict or acquit the heroine of any of the charges that are commonly brought against her. Throughout the first four acts Cleopatra seems loyal, yet disloyal to Antony. Ultimately, it is not until her lover's death scene that the audience's doubts and fears about the Queen finally begin to clear, for here we begin to see that her affection is founded on a real admiration for the hero. Her speeches become

rhetorically elevated. When she first beholds the dying Antony her words are magnificent:

> O sun,
> Burn the great sphere thou mov'st in! darkling stand
> The varying shore o'th' world! (IV.xv.9-11)

Moreover, the elevation in mood is visually underlined by the physical raising of Antony. Although Cleopatra's speech during the execution of this manoeuvre is laden with sexual innuendo and thus provides momentary relief from the solemnity of the scene, the dialogue soon becomes elevated again. Cleopatra expresses her admiration for Antony in some of the finest language and metaphor in the entire drama:

> Noblest of men, woo't die?
> Hast thou no care of me? Shall I abide
> In this dull world, which in thy absence is
> No better than a sty? O, see, my women:
> [Antony dies.]
> The crown o'th' earth doth melt. My lord!
> O, wither'd is the garland of the war,
> The soldier's pole is fall'n! Young boys and girls
> Are level now with men; the odds is gone,
> And there is nothing left remarkable
> Beneath the visiting moon. [Faints.] (IV.xv.59-68)

There can be no question as to the depth of Cleopatra's sincerity here. Without Antony the heroine is no longer a Queen, she is "No more but [e'en] a woman" (IV.xv.73). In her final speech she is sober, determined. Her frivolity has completely vanished. She sees her task before her and grimly resolves not only to perform it, but to do so in the noblest of fashions:

> Patience is sottish, and impatience does
> Become a dog that's mad. Then is it sin
> To rush into the secret house of death

> Ere death dare come to us? How do you, women?
> What, what, good cheer! Why, how now, Charmian?
> My noble girls! Ah, women, women! Look
> Our lamp is spent, it's out. Good sirs, take heart,
> We'll bury him; and then, what's brave, what's noble,
> Let's do't after the high Roman fashion,
> And make death proud to take us. Come, away,
> This case of that huge spirit now is cold.
> Ah, women, women! Come, we have no friend
> But resolution and the briefest end. (IV.xv.78-91)

It is left, then, to wonder at Cleopatra's hesitations in the final act. As the fourth act concludes she seems bent on taking her own life and yet she appears to reconsider her decision in the fifth. Some critics question her sincerity here, asserting that she is merely biding her time until she can determine whether Caesar will treat her honourably should she resolve not to commit suicide.[4] Those who take this approach to the play usually conclude that Cleopatra's final decision to kill herself comes after Dolabella confirms Caesar's intent to lead her in triumph in Act Five (V.ii.198-204). Yet such an approach to the drama overlooks several indications throughout the fourth and the fifth acts that Cleopatra does in fact remain loyal to Antony and that her hesitations are the result of something other than her desire to confirm Caesar's intentions before taking her own life. Indeed, if we look closely at the evidence provided by the dramatist in the final scenes it seems illogical to suggest otherwise.

As we leave Cleopatra at the end of the fourth act she is talking of suicide; when we rejoin her in act V.ii her thoughts have not wandered.

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[4] See A.C. Bradley. "Shakepseare's *Antony and Cleopatra*." In *Shakespeare: Antony and Cleopatra*. Ed. John Russell Brown. Casebook series. London: Macmillan, 1968. Bradley asserts that "The thing that drives her to die is the certainty that she will be carried to Rome to grace [Caesar's] triumph. That alone decides her" (p. 82).

When alone with her own people she speaks of her resolution openly:

> My desolation does begin to make
> A better life. 'Tis paltry to be Caesar;
> Not being Fortune, he's but Fortune's knave,
> A minister of her will: and it is great
> To do that thing that ends all other deeds,
> Which shackles accidents and bolts up change,
> Which sleeps, and never palates more the dung,
> The beggar's nurse and Caesar's. (V.ii.1-8)

It is not until Proculeius enters with news from Caesar that her resolve seems to vanish. With surprising suddenness she completely rejects her previous thoughts and begins to flatter Caesar shamelessly:

> Pray you tell him
> I am his fortune's vassal, and I send him
> The greatness he has got. I hourly learn
> A doctrine of obedience, and would gladly
> Look him i'th' face. (V.ii.28-32)

Yet, having declared her supposed subservience to the Roman emperor, she then draws a dagger on herself in the next moment when she is unexpectedly surrounded by his guard. Again she is bent on death: "Where art thou, death?/ Come hither, come! Come, come and take a queen/ Worth many babes and beggars!" (V.ii.46-48). Now the only message she has for Caesar is "Say, I would die" (V.ii.70). In light of what we have learned of Cleopatra's ability to play-act it becomes apparent that her statement of subservience is a ploy to trick Caesar into thinking she will not attempt to take her life and thus give herself the latitude to plan a suicide which will make "death proud to take [her]" (IV.xv.88). When she is surprised by the Roman troops, however, her plot is thwarted. Thinking that she will be put under guard and thus prevented from carrying out her

plan, she attempts to make a quick end of herself.

She is more successful in her later attempt to deceive Caesar during the incident involving her treasurer, Seleucus (V.ii.111-190).[5] Ironically, in this scene both Caesar and Cleopatra are employing the same tactics in an effort to fool each other. Caesar is attempting to convince Cleopatra that he intends her no harm. He falsely assures her that Rome will forgive the "record of what injuries you did us" (V.ii.118) and later advises her that "we intend so to dispose you as/ Yourself shall give us counsel" (V.ii.186-187). In reality, however, it is the Egyptian Queen who is deceiving Caesar. As Harold C. Goddard observes, she is using her art to convince Caesar that she is "still angling for life":

> Whether this little play within the play was planned in advance in consultation with Seleucus and he too is acting, or whether it is a piece of inspired improvisation on her part alone, struck off at the instant of her treasurer's betrayal of her, makes little difference. The reason Cleopatra kept back some of her treasures is the same in either case: to throw the gullible Caesar off the track of her intention. (Goddard 138)

It is clear, then, that Cleopatra has decided on death long before Dolabella announces Caesar's intents to parade her through Syria. Yet this is not to say that she does not make good use of Dolabella's information; she uses it, not to confirm her own decision, but rather to convince her women to follow her:

> Now, Iras, what think'st thou?
> Thou, an Egyptian puppet, shall be shown
> In Rome as well as I. Mechanic slaves

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[5] For a detailed analysis of this scene see J. Shaw. "Cleopatra and Seleucus." *Review of English Literature* 7 (1966): 79-86.

> With greasy aprons, rules, and hammers shall
> Uplift us to the view. In their thick breaths,
> Rank of gross diet, shall we be enclouded,
> And forc'd to drink their vapor. (V.ii.207-213)

Ultimately, Cleopatra's hesitations in the final act can be attributed to three things: her need to throw Caesar off her intentions, her desire to convince her women to follow her, and the fact that the preferred agent of death, which she has already arranged to be delivered to the monument, has yet to arrive in the Clown's basket.

The audience may doubt Cleopatra throughout the first four acts, and may even remain sceptical in the last, but all misgivings about the worthiness of the Egyptian Queen should clear in the concluding lines of the drama. Cleopatra's death scene is final proof of her genuine love for Antony. Throughout the play she may struggle against the constancy of love, she may behave erratically and test Antony to his limit, but as she approaches death she is unwavering:

> My resolution's plac'd . . .
> . . . now from head to foot
> I am marble-constant; now the fleeting moon
> No planet is of mine. (V.ii.238-241)

Now she is Antony's bride; before she applies the asp she dresses in her finest robes, dons her crown and speaks her wedding vows: "Husband, I come!/ Now to that name my courage prove my title! (V.ii.287-288).[6]

For the audience this death scene provides more than the final

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[6] In "'New Heaven, New Earth': The Escape From Mutability in *Antony and Cleopatra*." *Shakespeare Quarterly* 33 (1982), William D. Wolf makes the interesting observation that Cleopatra's death scene is in fact an inversion of Antony's death scene: ". . . as Antony had stripped off his armour, Cleopatra inverts this action by putting on the symbols of political office, her robe and crown" (335).

evidence of Cleopatra's true love for Antony. Without the Queen's death, Antony's tragic death would be incomplete. As John Rees Moore observes,

> unless [Cleopatra] dies the world may remember Antony's greatness but not hers, and that would be a disservice to his memory as well as hers. She must be worthy of Antony, or she will demean him, herself, and love in all men's eyes. (Moore 670)

Ultimately, to recognize that Antony's fascination for Cleopatra had its great side we must also appreciate that it was based on a true instinct, that his life was not one of mere sensual indulgence, but was given to a lady who had great nobility. Cleopatra's death vindicates Antony's love for her as his vindicates her love for him. The tragedy is thus perfectly balanced and in the end Caesar's words ring true:

> No grave upon the earth shall clip in it
> A pair so famous. High events as these
> Strike those that make them; and their story is
> No less in pity than his glory which
> Brought them to be lamented. (V.ii.359-363)

Cleopatra, then, cannot be viewed as a "typical woman" who prevents her lover from realising his potential as the sole ruler of the Roman empire. She is far too complex a character to deserve such a narrow assessment. She is Antony's equal, not his foil. She adds mystery and colour to the drama. Most important, however, is that her death is essential to the completion of the tragic thought. Dressed in her best robes, joking that Iras will demand the first immortal kiss from Antony, rebuking Caesar even as she breathes her last breath, Cleopatra is dazzling to the end, a true "princess/ Descended of so many royal kings" (V.ii.326-327).

Chapter Four

Happy Valiancy: The Style of *Antony and Cleopatra*.

Dignified as Antony and Cleopatra are by their nobility and grandeur, by their imaginative aspirations and "immortal longings," one can understand how difficult it might remain for any audience to modify its moral scheme to accommodate the irregular liaison of the pair. That this has indeed been a worry of varying dimension during the last four centuries is indicated by the history of the drama's reception; but that it has not seriously diminished or invalidated the play's impact is due to the peculiar manner in which the tragedy is presented. Samuel Taylor Coleridge was clearly aware of this, and in a remarkable piece of criticism characterized the style of the play thus:

> *Feliciter audax* is the motto for its style comparatively with that of Shakespeare's other works, even as it is the general motto of all his works compared with those of other poets. Be it remembered, too, that this happy valiancy of style is but the representative and result of all the material excellencies so expressed. (Coleridge 29)

What Coleridge is really drawing attention to here is the free and easy style, the racy quality of much of the dialogue, situations and characters which together make light of those aspects of the drama which might otherwise be felt to be self-condemnatory and morally reprehensible. It is precisely to put the audience in the proper frame of mind to appreciate the tragedy of the lovers that Shakespeare employs a mixture of cynicism and mockery

which acts as a sort of choral device to enable us to laugh off the seamy side of the story.

Throughout *Antony and Cleopatra* the quantity of expressions which border on slang and which convey the impression of "spaciousness," is unusually high. As Phyllis Rackin observes in "Shakespeare's Boy Cleopatra, the Decorum of Nature, and the Golden World of Poetry," there is a certain degree of "recklessness"

> apparent . . .in the language of the play, with its curious mixture of the most elevated Latinisms and the coarsest contemporary slang, its mixed metaphors, its elliptical constructions, and its exuberant disregard for grammatical convention. (Rackin 201)

Alluding to Cleopatra's words to Charmian and Iras in the final act, "I shall see/ Some squeaking Cleopatra boy my greatness/ I'th' posture of a whore" (V.ii.219-221), Rackin continues: "That *boy* is a verb is no anomaly in a play where hearts can "spaniel" at Antony's heels and the moon can "disponge" the damp of night upon Enobarbus" (Rackin 201). In addition to such irregular usages, the play is replete with colloquial talk which does not always proceed from the mouths of the less distinguished personalities. For example, Caesar, perhaps the most formal of all the characters, refers to Antony as an "old ruffian" at the beginning of the fourth act (IV.i.4), and Cleopatra threatens to give Charmian "bloody teeth" when she questions the sincerity of her mistress's love for Antony (I.v.70). In the final act, such colloquialisms are blended with some of the most rhetorically elevated passages in all Shakespeare. During her death scene the Queen refers to Caesar as an "ass/ Unpolicied" in the midst one of the most moving

speeches in the drama:

> Come, thou mortal wretch,
> [*To an asp, which she applies to her breast.*]
> With thy sharp teeth this knot intrinsicate
> Of life at once untie. Poor venomous fool,
> Be angry, and dispatch. O, couldst thou speak,
> That I might hear thee call great Caesar ass
> Unpolicied! (V.ii.303-308)

Apart from the abundance of such slangy or colloquial expressions, there is an overtone of salaciousness which is peculiar to *Antony and Cleopatra*. Throughout the drama the characters, whether Roman or Egyptian, servant class or nobility, delight in bawdy talk. We see this first in I.ii, where Charmian and Iras are enjoying a somewhat questionable conversation with the Soothsayer. The fortune teller's observation that the maids' fortunes are alike sparks a volley of loaded remarks:

> *Iras.* Am I not an inch of fortune better than she?
> *Char.* Well, if you were but an inch of fortune
> better than I, where would you choose it?
> *Iras.* Not in my husband's nose. (I.ii.58-61)[7]

An equally bawdy conversation occurs in II.v, where Cleopatra teases her eunuch following Charmian's suggestion that she play billiards with him:

> *Cleo.* As well a woman with an eunuch play'd
> As with a woman. Come, you'll play with me, sir?
> *Mar.* As well as I can, madam.
> *Cleo.* And when good will is show'd, though't come too short,
> The actor may plead pardon. (II.v.5-9)

But such suggestive conversations do not occur only in Cleopatra's court. When Enobarbus is describing Cleopatra's first meeting with Antony during

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[7] See E.A.M. Colman. *The Dramatic Use of Bawdy in Shakespeare*. London: Longman Group Ltd., 1974. 205. Colman observes that Iras's use of the term nose is probably a "jocular avoidance of *yard*," the normal sixteenth-century word for penis.

the famous barge scene Agrippa interjects:

> Royal wench!
> She made great Caesar lay his sword to bed;
> He ploughed her, and she cropp'd. (II.ii.226-228)

In his address to the British Academy E.A.J. Honigmann observes that such "concealed penis imagery" recurs throughout the drama in spite of the fact that the "wicked word is not mentioned--indeed, was not known yet, though the English language was rich in alternatives" (Honigmann 107). Nevertheless, what all this suggestive dialogue accomplishes is, as E.A.M. Colman asserts in *The Dramatic Use of Bawdy in Shakespeare*, to evoke "a sense of tolerance" (Colman 142). Time and time again the audience finds itself laughing at loaded comments or bluntly lewd remarks. It thus becomes difficult to criticize the protagonists even if we do find them to be slightly lascivious, for if we condemn them we must also condemn ourselves.

In addition to the salacious atmosphere of the drama, there is an overall cynicism evident in *Antony and Cleopatra* which is not as apparent in the other tragedies. This cynicism is exuded at different times by many of the characters, but is particularly attributable to Enobarbus, who offers a running commentary on the course of events and thus functions as a sort of chorus. Enobarbus is an interesting individual because he is not typical of Shakespearean tragedy. In his humorous cynicism he seems more reminiscent of comic characters like Touchstone from *As You Like It*. As J.L. Simmons observes in "The Comic Pattern and Vision in *Antony and Cleopatra*," Enobarbus is

> a character from the comic world who would have found a place very near the center of a comic reconciliation. He is firmly grounded in reality and good sense but with ironic detachment. (Simmons 499)

During the first lengthy view the audience is given of Enobarbus his comments are typical of the cynical judgments he makes throughout the remainder of the drama. When Antony decides to depart for Rome after receiving news of Fulvia's death in I.ii Enobarbus jests that Cleopatra will not take the news lightly:

> *Ant.* I must be gone.
> *Eno.* Under a compelling occasion, let women die. It were pity to cast them away for nothing, though between them and a great cause, they should be esteem'd nothing. Cleopatra, catching but the least noise of this, dies instantly; I have seen her die twenty times upon far poorer moment. I do think there is mettle in death, which commits some loving act upon her, she hath such a celerity in dying. (I.ii.133-144)

In the following scene his astuteness is illustrated. Even before Antony announces his intent to return to Rome Cleopatra guesses at his objective and reacts in precisely the manner in which Enobarbus predicted she would in the preceding scene:

> *Char.* . . . here comes Antony.
> *Cleo.* I am sick and sullen.
> *Ant.* I am sorry to give breathing to my purpose--
> *Cleo.* Help me away, dear Charmian, I shall fall.
> It cannot be thus long, the sides of nature
> Will not sustain it. (I.iii.13-18)

Similarly, Enobarbus offers little sympathy when his master gravely discloses his wife's death. Instead he is amused by Antony's despondency over such a convenient occurrence:

> Eno. Why, sir, give the gods a thankful sacrifice. When

> it pleaseth their deities to take the wife of a man from him, it shows to man the tailors of the earth; comforting therein, that when old robes are worn out, there are members to make new. If there were no more women but Fulvia, then had you indeed a cut, and the case to be lamented. This grief is crown'd with consolation: your old smock brings forth a new petticoat, and indeed the tears live in an onion that should water this sorrow.
> (I.ii.160-170)

This passage is again typical of his speeches throughout the play in that it is comical but nevertheless accurate. Antony has been committing adultery for years, his wife has been the chief cause of the current wars against Caesar and he has just admitted to the audience that he had wished her dead: "There's a great spirit gone! Thus did I desire it" (I.ii.122). It is no wonder that Enobarbus should laugh at his master's melancholy. What Shakespeare achieves through Enobarbus in both these instances, then, is to draw the audience's attention to unpleasant traits in the protagonists (Cleopatra's tendency to overreact extravagantly to situations and Antony's unjust treatment of his wife) and to make us join with him in laughing at these less attractive aspects of their natures. As a result we are effectively prevented from dwelling negatively on the darker sides of the hero and heroine's characters.

All through the play the wit and the appropriateness of Enobarbus's cynicism has the effect of making the reader accept his point of view. It is therefore significant that although he often draws the audience's attention to the protagonists' shortcomings he is also frequently assigned speeches which illustrate their greatness. Thus, while he may ridicule Cleopatra's foolishness in I.ii, he describes her as "o'er-picturing . . . Venus" in II.ii, and

continues in an awed voice to describe an occasion on which he saw her running through the street:

> I saw her once
> Hop forty paces through the public street;
> And having lost her breath, she spoke, and panted,
> That she did make defect perfection,
> And breathless, pow'r breathe forth.
> (II.ii.229-232)

But it is perhaps his next utterance which, above all others, illuminates the greatness of her person:

> Age cannot wither her, nor custom stale
> Her infinite variety. Other women cloy
> The appetites they feed, but she makes hungry
> Where most she satisfies; for vilest things
> Become themselves in her, that the holy priests
> Bless her when she is riggish. (II.ii.233-239)

Similarly, it is Enobarbus who ultimately draws the audience's attention to the hero's excellence. Throughout the drama he continually passes judgement on Antony's actions and his assessments are invariably correct. As noted in the first chapter, it is Enobarbus who foresees the outcome of Antony's marriage to Octavia, and he who warns his master not to fight by sea at Actium. In both cases his opinion is validated by the outcome of the action, yet he does not gloat over his foresightedness; instead he says virtually nothing and quietly resolves to "yet follow/ The wounded chance of Antony" (III.x.34-35). When his master displays unnecessary cruelty by whipping Caesar's messenger and subsequently decides to return to the battlefield to face his powerful opponent again after his devastating loss at Actium, Enobarbus certainly seems more than justified in resolving to "seek/ Some way to leave him" (III.xiii.199-200). It

is at this point, however, that Shakespeare tips the tragic scales; rather than emphasizing Antony's failings, Enobarbus's desertion serves only to illuminate the hero's generosity and heighten the dramatic impact of his impending death. As soon as Enobarbus has defected he realises his mistake. Caesar will offer him "entertainment but/ No honorable trust" (IV.vi.16-17). Yet it is the arrival of one of Octavius's soldiers with the news that Antony has sent the deserter's treasure after him which finally brings the magnitude of his error home to Enobarbus. The hero may not be reasoning properly; he may be failing in his military endeavours and be on the verge of losing the Roman empire, but in the words of Caesar's own soldier, Antony "Continues still a Jove" (IV.vi.28). Enobarbus, who has gained the audience's respect through his foresight and wit, now becomes the greatest testament to Antony's excellence. As Duncan S. Harris observes in "'Again for Cydnus': The Dramaturgical Resolution of Antony and Cleopatra,"

> We have trusted Enobarbus because he reasoned well and clearly, yet now he testifies with his death to the value of Antony's love, despite his earlier rational understanding of the ruin which that love brought Antony. . . . Enobarbus's last actions come to serve the cause of love, and they at last offer proof of the limitations of all the rational Roman judgments of Antony, both past and to come. (Harris 224-225)

Ultimately, Harris concludes, "a revolution of judgement has taken place. And we have participated in it" (Harris 225). Enobarbus, then, functions in two capacities: he is both the comical cynic who enables us to laugh off the seedy side of the drama and the individual who helps bring the

audience to a realization of the nobility which lies beneath the protagonists' less attractive qualities.

In addition to Enobarbus's character, there are other comic elements which Shakespeare employs in an effort to put the audience in the proper frame of mind to appreciate the play. In particular, the dramatist creates a comical undertone by portraying many incidents and situations which are really quite frivolous. For example, Cleopatra's court is always presented to us on all its most trivial occasions. We never see any weighty meetings of councils or any impressive pageants. In the first act the courtiers gather to hear their fortunes read by a soothsayer after Antony and Cleopatra have resolved to "wander through the streets and note/ The qualities of people" (I.i.53-54). As the scene progresses the wine flows freely, the maids indulge in bawdy conversations with the fortune teller and the men offer the odd drunken comment on the proceedings. The next view we have of Cleopatra's court is very similar in its buffoonery. Antony has departed for Rome and Cleopatra is lounging around with her servants wishing she "might sleep out this great gap of time/ My Antony is away" (I.v.5-6). Again, there are the suggestive conversations and the lewd remarks. It is difficult to imagine this apparently frivolous woman in her capacity as ruler of the Egyptian world; indeed, she seems to have little else to do but engage in idle conversation and send her lover "twenty several messengers" daily (I.v.62). As J.L. Simmons observes:

> In Egypt . . . the sanctions and restrictions of society have been overturned into one endless holiday spirit . . .. The "now" is the only reality, a constant present in

> which the considerations and responsibilities of past and future do not exist. (Simmons 494-495)

Thus, the general impression the audience is given of the Egyptian court is one of triviality and idleness, as well as magnificence. And Cleopatra is the ruling spirit of it all.

Rome too, and its serious policy, are also berated in this cynical manner. Even Antony's most weighty conferences with Caesar cannot be taken entirely seriously, for they consist mainly in patching up personal jealousies and are interspersed with Enobarbus's ironic comments. This is evident in Antony's first meeting with Caesar in II.ii. The way in which the two leaders circle each other like estranged dogs before beginning their dialogue is laughable. Neither will condescend to sit before the other does and so they both remain standing. Subsequently they begin to quarrel over petty disagreements, completely ignoring the original purpose of their meeting (the threat Pompey is posing to the Roman empire), until they are reminded of it by the impatient onlookers:

> *Maec.* If it might please you, to enforce no further
> The griefs between ye: to forget them quite
> Were to remember that the present need
> Speaks to atone you.
> *Lep.* Worthily spoken, Maecenas.
> *Eno.* Or, if you borrow one another's love for the instant, you may, when you hear no more words of Pompey, return it again. You shall have time to wrangle in when you have nothing else to do.
> (II.ii.99-106)

Ultimately, it is not until Antony's marriage to Octavia has been arranged that the two finally put aside their differences long enough to address more pressing matters.

The scene in the play which seems to lend atmosphere to the entire drama and borders most closely on pure comedy is also a Roman scene. Indeed, the feast on Pompey's galley during the second act is reminiscent of the unrestrained pleasure of the Falstaffian carousals in *Henry IV, Part One*. Lepidus becomes so drunk that he has to be carried to bed, and the austere Caesar consumes enough wine that his "tongue/ Spleets what it speaks" (II.vii.123-124). Those who are left standing at the end of the evening start singing raucous drinking songs and before the night is over even "Strong Enobarb/ Is weaker than the wine" (II.vii.122-123) and has managed to lose his cap overboard.

Even the most rigid of the Roman characters, Octavius Caesar, is not immune to the facetious undertone which pervades the drama. He may berate Antony for wasting "The lamps of night in revel" (I.iv.5), and he may turn his nose up at the rowdy behaviour of his companions on Pompey's galley, but nevertheless Caesar too has his laughable qualities. Of course he is just as guilty as Antony of quarrelling over petty issues during their conferences. He is especially comical, however, in his futile attempts to catch Cleopatra for his victory procession in the final act. Indeed, a good portion of this act ends up being a mental battle between Caesar and Cleopatra which the emperor ultimately loses. What is amusing about this struggle is Caesar's smugness throughout. There is no question that he drastically underestimates his opponent. After the incident involving Cleopatra's treasurer, Seleucus, he feels secure in the notion that he has duped the queen, as is indicated by his condescending parting remarks to

her and the fact that he leaves her virtually unguarded:

> . . . be cheer'd,
> Make not your thoughts your prisons; no, dear Queen,
> For we intend so to dispose you as
> Yourself shall give us counsel. Feed, and sleep.
> Our care and pity is so much upon you,
> That we remain your friend, and so adieu.
> (V.ii.184-189)

Certainly Cleopatra is not fooled by this speech, and she says as much as soon as Caesar and his train have departed: "He words me, girls, he words me, that I should not/ Be noble to myself" (V.ii.191-192). The somewhat dubious humour in all this is the fact that the ruler of the Roman empire and all of his armies ultimately fail in their seemingly simple task of preventing three imprisoned, unarmed women from taking their own lives. The comedy is heightened by the fact that, as J.L. Simmons observes, "a clown appropriately brings on the means of death" (Simmons 493).

Nevertheless, Shakespeare does not let comedy have free reign. Even the most amusing of the scenes have a sinister undertone which keeps the humour within limits and makes the audience always aware of reality. This is evident when Charmian and Iras are discussing their futures with the Soothsayer in I.ii. There is a definite sense of foreboding when the fortune teller predicts Charmian's fate:

> Sooth. You shall outlive the lady whom you serve.
> Char. O, excellent, I love long life better than figs.
> Sooth. You have seen and prov'd a fairer former fortune
> Than that which is to approach. (I.ii.31-34)

Not only do the Soothsayer's predictions prove accurate, but even Charmian's flippant remark is an unwitting reference to the clown's deadly

gift in the last act. Similarly, in II.iii Cleopatra's light-hearted reminiscing about past times is suddenly cut short by the entrance of the messenger bearing news of Antony's marriage to Octavia. The woman who now flies into a rage upon hearing the messenger's news certainly bears no resemblance to the jovial person who only moments before was fondly remembering the amusing tricks she used to play on her lover.

Even the comical scene aboard Pompey's galley has its humour qualified. Caesar participates in the festivities very reluctantly and is disgusted by Lepidus's gullible acceptance of Antony's description of the Egyptian Crocodile. Antony, although he enjoys teasing Lepidus, is ultimately concerned at the third ruler's simple-mindedness and his apparent vulnerability to attack from Caesar: "These quicksands, Lepidus,/ Keep off them, for you sink" (II.vii.59-60). Most significant, however, is the fact that the entire scene is interspersed with Menas's whispered conversation to Pompey in which the pirate suggests that they slaughter all the guests:

> These three world-sharers, these competitors,
> Are in thy vessel. Let me cut the cable,
> And when we are put off, fall to their throats:
> All there is thine. (II.vii.70-73)

The humour of the scene aboard the galley is further undercut by the contents of the subsequent scene. Immediately following the exit of the drunken assembly, Antony's officer Ventidius parades onto the stage with the body of the Parthian King's dead son after having returned home victorius from the wars against Parthia. The effect is to bring the still chuckling audience to earth with a resounding thud. Yet even this scene

has its petty side. Ventidius is obviously elated with his victory but must restrain himself from pressing his conquests any further lest Antony become jealous. As he explains to Silius:

> Better to leave undone, than by our deed
> Acquire too high a fame when him we serve's away.
> Caesar and Antony have ever won
> More in their officer than person. Sossius,
> One of my place in Syria, his lieutenant,
> For quick accumulation of renown,
> Which he achiev'd by th' minute, lost his favor.
> Who does i'th' wars more than his captain can
> Becomes his captain's captain; and ambition
> (The soldier's virtue) rather makes choice of loss
> Than gain which darkens him.
> I could do more to do Antonius good,
> But 'twould offend him; and in his offense
> Should my performance perish. (III.i.14-27)

Thus, throughout the drama there is always an intermingling of the trivial and the serious. By sinister suggestions and poetic richness the comedy is kept within bounds, yet it still serves the function of allowing the audience to view the play critically but with humorous detachment.

Its comical undertone, then, is essential to *Antony and Cleopatra*. It is the means by which Shakespeare makes light of the side of the protagonists' characters which is distinctive rather than heroic. Antony and Cleopatra are great people, but even so, to accept their point of view wholly would mean the sacrifice of some morals and ideals, such as temperance, patriotism and fidelity, which Shakespeare's audience would have taken seriously. By infusing a cynical aspect into the story Shakespeare manages to divert the audience's attention from the play's less noble aspects, and thus, in spite of its seedy side, the drama "leaves us, no less than any other, lost in

astonishment at the powers which created it" (Bradley 85).

In laughing off the dark side of the story, Shakespeare is not tricking us. On the contrary, he is using a legitimate means of his art to bring out the inherent greatness of something not in every way great, to reveal the nobility buried underneath the dross. His purpose is to show the beauty and poetry of life, which is often best revealed in a situation like this. Shakespeare's object is not to present ideal characters or to lay down rules of conduct. He recognises the complexity of human nature and merely shows us what he admires and asks us to admire it also. Although the love of Antony and Cleopatra does not conform to the norm of moral behaviour, it is genuine and has a truly heroic and self-transcending side to it. Just as the dramatist has written his play, in a humorous yet elevated style, so his protagonists live their lives: with lighthearted boldness. Here we see the fusing of style and theme, and here we see the appropriateness of Coleridge's motto for the play.

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